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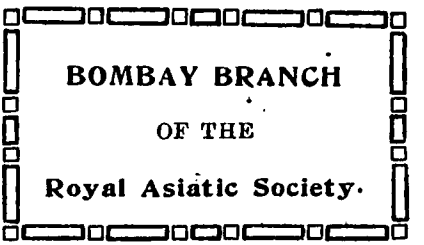

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MOLOCH:

A Story of Sacrifice.

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED,

AUTHOR OF

"AN AUSTRALIAN HEROINE," "POLICY AND PASSION,"
"NADINE," ETC.

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INSCRIBED

To my Father

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF THAT HAPPY ENGLISH SUMMER

WHICH AFTER A LONG SEPARATION

WE SPENT TOGETHER,

AND WITH WHICH

THIS BOOK

IS IN OUR MINDS ASSOCIATED.

"And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Moloch."

"Aristotle defines κάθαρσις—the cleansing—of passion as the elevating joy felt in the victory over that which threatens the moral order of the world, and in the certainty that every crime carries in itself the seeds of its own retribution, the world's history becoming the world's judgment. Thus in κάθαρσις lies the very essence of tragedy, a giant fate, crushing the man while it raises mankind."

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MOLOCH.

PART I.

THE INVOCATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE TABLE D'HÔTE AT MRS. BONAMORRIS'S.

It was the dinner-hour at Mrs. Bonamorris's boarding-house. The month was November—November in the tropics. The evening was sultry, and the windows stood wide open. Those at the end of the room were overshadowed by a deep verandah, and led into a garden green with the foliage of banana trees and ornamental palms, and gay with flaming gladioli and crimson-streaked tiger-lilies. The other two faced a straggling street, where low bungalow-like houses, embowered by bougainvillea and Cape jessamine, stood side by side with smart villas, wooden shanties, and primitive-looking shops, with a break here and there of a piece of waste land covered with a low growth of cida-retusa or thorny acacia. This street—evidently the suburb of a colonial town—was partially screened from the observation of Mrs. Bonamorris's boarders by several flowering oleander shrubs, a spiky yucca plant, and a tall bamboo which shivered and groaned in the light breeze that swept up from the river.

The broad blue stretch of water, beyond which lay the city of Leichardt's Town, and which was dotted with steamers plying, vessels at anchor, schooners and various small craft,

formed a background to foliage and roof-tops. It appeared to take a series of snake-like curves, for it was visible again through the other windows across the expanse of garden, and seemed to wind round a second point, losing itself between grassy banks, fringed by mangrove and lantana shrubs.

Ten persons or more were seated at the table, each representing a particular section of Antipodean society. The landlady sat at the head. She was a stout upright matron, with projecting teeth and an emphatic twist of the under lip. Her opinions were always dogmatically expressed, and she piqued herself upon her invulnerability to prejudice and upon the orthodoxy of her theological views. To-day her temper had been slightly ruffled, and she was more dogmatic and more orthodox than usual.

She was faced at the other end of the table by a member of the Legislative Assembly, who as a potential minister enjoyed a consideration which might not otherwise have been awarded him. This gentleman was stout, sunburnt, vinous-looking. He had lately conducted to his satisfaction the operation of shearing his mighty flocks, and was at this time, during the course of a short spring session, fulfilling his duty to his country by slumbering in spasmodic fashion on the cross-benches, and imbibing unlimited potations in the parliamentary refreshment-room.

Beside him was a squatter from the north, of antagonistic political principle, who cherished visions of reform in the law of land tenure, and was convinced that could he but possess the ear of the House for one hour Free Selectors would be obliged to retire discomfited and the Squatterarchy rule triumphant, and who was now, to use his own vernacular, "blowing" the merits of his run for the benefit of an acute-looking Victorian speculator seated opposite.

Next came the proprietor of a sugar plantation, a large, impressive personage, with a standing grievance against circumstance. His stock-in-trade was represented by sundry samples in whitey-brown bags heaped up beside his plate; and his voice, raised in a tone of plaintive protest, was directed towards the senator.

"Excuse me, my dear sir, but there is one important element in the system of Immigration which you Australian legislators entirely overlook. That is *class*. A premium should be placed on Culture. Free Selectors of education and refined

taste should be encouraged, protected, offered advantages of locality, and inducements to herd together. Why, sir, look at me. I have traversed Europe, have studied art in the greatest galleries of the world, and can speak five languages with fluency. My wife, sir—she too has travelled, and is able to converse with ease in three. She plays classical music; but Lord bless you! there is not an individual within thirty miles of us who is capable of discriminating between Offenbach and Beethoven. Is it reasonable to suppose that our minds can subsist upon sugar? We are mentally starved. Isolation is our lot; unappreciation our portion."

No one contradicted this melancholy statement; and the victim to barbarism and sugar helped himself to salad with the air of a martyr.

"Buy a barrel-organ," grunted the senator after a pause; "there's lots of 'em in Sydney streets;" and the Victorian remarked drily:

"If you want to legislate for Free Selectors in this free dominion, you had better advise them to keep quiet, and soft sawder the squatters. There's a saying with us that a pound of molasses will catch more flies than a barrel of vinegar, and it's about true;" while the belligerent squatter announced it as his opinion that there was a deal too much culture of a sort he did not approve of, or his cattle either, among the Free Selectors already, and he for his part had no wish to see it extended.

Further up each side of the table, sat, in due order, a clerk under Government, who cultivated an air of red-tapism, hinted darkly at state secrets, sported a flower in his button-hole, and wore a signet-ring; a Methodist clergyman of the unctious, self-sufficient sort; a bearded, Yahoo-like individual from the Western wilds, about whose admission into her polished circle Mrs. Bonamorris had entertained doubts, and who, after casting puzzled, furtive glances round the assemblage, had made a stealthy grab at the napkin lying pyramid-wise beside his plate, and had breathed a deep, shuddering "My word" when the dainty roll of bread fell from between its folds; a frank, tawny-whiskered bushman, who had been expatiating with many "you knows" and "well you sees" upon the miseries of "overlanding" cattle; and, beyond, an old maid, with nose and chignon of the teapot order, who was a daily governess, and lodged at Mrs. Bona-

morris's in the hope, some said, of entrapping a husband; and next her an Englishman of a very different type to his male companions.

That he was an Englishman in whom Australian hardships had not effaced European polish was evident, but how especially distinguished it would perhaps have been difficult to point out. Nowhere is the hall-mark of civilization more apparent than in Australia; nowhere is it less definable. Colonel Gilmore was neither strikingly soldier-like, strikingly handsome, nor particularly young; but his face, thin, high-bred, with short pointed beard, straight nose, deep-set, indifferent eyes, and a general air of aloofness and of half-melancholy, half-cynical superiority, suggested emotional experience of a highly wrought order, and set the mind instantly at work in conjectures upon a past which appeared to offer food for romantic interest. He had arrived at Mrs. Bonamorris's only that very morning; but already gossip was rife concerning him. It was known that he was the second son of an English baronet; that he had dissipated a fair fortune in riotous living, and had violated more than one article of the Decalogue. A remote northern station had been the scene of his lonely penance. There he had been buried for four years, and now, having by the death of a maternal uncle unexpectedly inherited a small property in his native land, was on his way thither, bent on retrieving past follies and errors, and was only enjoying the good things provided by Mrs. Bonamorris for her boarders while awaiting the departure of the mail-steamer bound for Singapore.

But the personage who attracted even more attention than Colonel Gilmore—a stout, rubicund gentleman, middle-aged, with clean shaven lip and chin, and whiskers plentifully besprinkled with grey, whose whole appearance indicated prosperity and a tendency to patronage—sat at the landlady's right. This was Andrew Medlicott, Esq., C.M.G., F.R.G.S., the owner of Champneys Court in Woodfordshire, and of various stations with unpronounceable names in Australia. Mr. Medlicott shone as a luminary of considerable magnitude both at home and abroad. He had at different times assumed a prominent part in Anglo-Antipodean affairs; was always foremost in rendering honour to colonial notabilities, and had represented his particular colony at several international exhibitions. He had made many voyages between England

and Australia, for his extensive property in the southern hemisphere required his frequent supervision; it was during one of these periodical tours of inspection, in which he was accompanied by his wife, that Mrs. Bonamorris had the honour of entertaining him. His protruding chin and broad, swelling chest—he was one of those men who are invariably seen in a tightly buttoned frock-coat—seemed to say, "I am the favourite of Fortune;" but in spite of his unconquerable self-assertiveness, he was kind-hearted and estimable, and deserved well of a world to which he always presented his most genial side.

Mrs. Medlicott, seated at her husband's left, was a high-complexioned lady, with large, rather hard features, iron-grey hair partly covered by a Parisian cap, and a set of artificial teeth which glistened between red thin lips. Her hands bore the traces of early labour, but she was careful to cover them with rings which had the appearance of heirlooms. She was of an upright, impressive presence, and looked round upon the other boarders with an air of condescension. She used a double eyeglass, made distant allusions to the charms of Champneys, and deprecated Mr. Medlicott's somewhat bombastic glorification of Australia. In his absence she was loquacious, having much to say upon the duties and trials of women of the upper class, upon the establishment of daughters, the claim of society, and the delinquencies of servants; but in the presence of her lord she affected an air of dignity and reserve, qualifying her silence by occasional admiring nods in his direction, which served to emphasize the words of wisdom and jocosity flowing from between his lips.

To Mr. Medlicott Mrs. Bonamorris was discoursing.

"I have always set my face against private sitting-rooms and meals apart," she remarked with asperity. "Dr. Rolt may be a great friend of yours, Mr. Medlicott, but I must be permitted to observe that I have no patience with intolerance and uppishness. In my opinion a public table tends to raise the tone of an establishment and to promote pleasant intercourse among its inmates."

"Hear, hear," murmured the member of Parliament, who had begun to nod between the courses. He nodded during the debates. It was said that he even nodded in his wool-shed while he sorted his wool.

"If *our* society is not good enough to satisfy Dr. Rolt and

his daughter, they should have lodged themselves in an hotel on the north side," continued the landlady.

"To be devoured by mosquitoes, and crawled over by cockroaches; whereas here—" said Mr. Medlicott, suavely supplying the gap by an expressive wave of his hand. "My dear lady, you will be merciful. Your general principles are admirable; but all generalities admit of exceptions. My dear good friend, Dr. Rolt, is a person out of the common."

"So I am given to understand," drily remarked Mrs. Bonamorris. "A woman-hater; an atheist——"

"A natural philosopher; a student of science; an exponent of the mysteries of nature," interpolated Mr. Medlicott. "I never was much of a philosopher myself, and the only secrets of nature that I ever seriously attempted to investigate are the causes of foot-rot and scab; but I can admire genius, and I am proud to claim the honour of Dr. Rolt's friendship."

"As for his books," said Mrs. Bonamorris stolidly, "I have read one of them, and am bound to confess that I could not see its drift. The "Creed of the Future," I think it was called. Stuff! There's no one in the world more tolerant of other people's prejudices than I am, but what we want with a new religion passes my understanding. I am quite satisfied to repeat the Lord's prayer and to instruct my children out of the Bible and Watts's Catechism, as my mother taught me—Hark, what is that!"

Mrs. Bonamorris paused and inclined her head in a listening attitude. Some one was singing softly, and as though unconscious of auditors, either in the garden or in the street without. It was a clear, passionless voice, which carolled in aboriginal doggrel a camp ditty of which the meaningless refrain ran:

"Wheelbarrow break him,
Walla tumble down:
Tupid fella, white fella,
Ba'al give him blanket.
Black fellow got him none."

"Ginevra!" murmured Mr. Medlicott, in a low scandalized tone.

"Charming!" ejaculated Colonel Gilmore, with a flash of interest darting from his eyes.

"One of Carter's girls over the way," remarked the land

lady with a nod of conviction. "They are dreadful imps, and I constantly find them peering in from the street and listening all ears to our talk. I hope it edifies them, for I have not the heart to tell tales of them. . . . I don't see any merit in following the lead of a pack of busy-bodies who buzz like a swarm of flies round a heap of bones," she continued discursively. "The world would get on a deal better without your Frederic Harrisons and Herbert Spencers. Let me show you that I *do* read my *Nineteenth Century*, Mr. Medlicott—I can't say that I think the metaphysical twaddle of the present day a grain more elevating than the rubbish that the ancients set such store on. Religious progress is like a crab walking backwards. Now I don't deny that I'm a half-believer in the doctrine of Transmigration. The extraordinary likenesses that I've seen between people and animals would set any one's mind working. Now there's an odd circumstance—it's a fact that when I was a girl, and came down dressed for a party with my hair curled—we wore sausage ringlets in those days," added Mrs. Bonamorris, touching her jetty front in sublime oblivion of the straggling fringe of grey which appeared beneath it, "my father used to say to me, 'Lor, Eliza! if you aren't for all the world like a well-curled poodle.' It was not flattering; but there is no need to remark that I stood behind the door when beauty was given out; and the remarkable thing is, that I can't go into a room where there is a dog, especially a poodle, without its settling at my feet. I should like to take an ape into your philosopher's sitting-room just to see if the two would recognize each other. But there is one thing certain, that the daughter must favour her mother whoever she may have been."

"Ginevra Rolt is a very pretty and talented girl," observed Mrs. Medlicott with dignity. She wished to reprove the landlady, who she considered was forgetting her position—"a little hoydenish perhaps; but that is hardly surprising when one considers the wretched way in which she has been brought up; and she has a very sweet disposition."

"What is more to the purpose," said Mr. Medlicott pompously, "she is heiress to a considerable fortune. I have reason to know that my friend Dr. Rolt is a wealthy man, though no one would imagine so, judging from the manner in which he lives."

"Are you talking of Rolt, the man who wrote 'Nature and

Morality?'" asked Colonel Gilmore with some interest. "He has a school of worshippers at home, but I had no idea that he lived in Australia."

"It is the same. He has built a house on the borders of my station, Birrali; does nothing with his land, but moons about the bush, prospecting, collecting specimens and bottling reptiles, in which occupations, unhappily for her, his daughter assists him. An eccentric misanthropic creature, but excellent company when you know him—which you never will do," added Mr. Medlicott with a laugh. "He refuses to make acquaintances, and rarely leaves home. He is in town now for a few days to consult a doctor. I'll introduce you to Miss Rolt, Gilmore, and I shouldn't mind laying long odds that the *Cawarra* sails for the north without you."

"She is a beautiful creature," exclaimed Mrs. Bonamorris, her horny eyes softening with moisture. "There's something uncommonly taking in her eyes. A bright fearless thing, who looks as if she could not tell a lie to save her life; free with her tongue, and asking about everything as though she had never seen a town in her life."

"Which is precisely the fact," said Mr Medlicott. "Ginevra Rolt has never spent three days away from Birrali since she arrived there eleven years ago."

"There's one thing certain," said Mrs. Bonamorris. "The love between her and her Daddy, as she calls him, is all on the child's side. She thinks a deal more of him than he of her."

Suddenly, and quite close to the window, the same voice which had startled them before, was heard again, raised in a sort of cooing lament.

"Wallabi Jo. Wallabi Jo.
Where the sheoak moans
By the lonely swamp,
And the firefly lights
His flickering lamp,
Sleeps my Wallabi Jo—my Wallabi Jo."

CHAPTER II.

GINEVRA.

"THAT is not one of Carter's girls at any rate," exclaimed Mrs. Bonamorris, rising. A shadow fell upon the table-cloth. The landlady uttered an ejaculation of dismay. The boarders shifted in their chairs; and all eyes turned towards the French window, where, framed by the withes of bougainvillea which twined the lintel, a young girl stood bareheaded with a bunch of roses in her hand.

She was slim and supple. A washed white muslin dress fell about her graceful form in folds which would have delighted a latter-day æsthete. Her neck and shoulders were beautifully moulded, and her skin possessed that exquisite purity which one frequently observes in the complexions of tropically born women. Her eyes were dark grey, long-shaped, and with turned-up lashes and extremely arched brows, that gave piquancy to her face, and contradicted the expression of a sensitive, almost melancholy mouth. Her hair was golden-brown, and curled naturally about her temples; delicious dimples lurked at the corners of her lips. In her whole air there was something at once frank, inquiring, mournful and yet joyous. Her shoulders drooped slightly; but her head was set uprightly in a manner which gave play to the round, delicately indented throat.

"Ginevra!" Mrs. Medlicott began in a hortatory manner.

The girl surveyed the group with lovely, unembarrassed eyes; but there was a trace of sadness in her voice when she spoke.

"I could not help hearing what you were talking about," she said. "I have been walking in the garden. Daddy sent me out; and I wanted to see the river and the ships and the great buildings. I thought you would have seen me or guessed who it was when you heard me sing. I dare say that you are right," she added, turning more directly towards Mrs. Bonamorris; "but it is not for you to judge between my Daddy and me. Our ways are different to yours. His mind is filled with great subjects. If you could know him, you would understand why it is not to be expected that he should

be demonstrative like others. But perhaps you will know some day. May I come in? It was pleasant watching you from the garden. I have seldom seen so many people together."

"Come in and welcome, Miss Rolt," said Mrs. Bonamorris, with fussy dignity, setting a chair at the end of the table beside Colonel Gilmore. "Let me beg your pardon for my thoughtless speech, and ask you to forget it."

Ginevra glided into the seat offered her, smiling sweetly upon the Englishman, who had risen as she approached. There followed a little buzz of apology, welcome, hardly disguised admiration, which she received with the composure of perfect simplicity.

"I hope, my dear, that your father is better this evening," said Mrs. Medlicott.

"He is resting after his journey," answered Ginevra. "He sent me away, he said, because he wished to be quiet. I don't think that he is really ill,—do you?"—waiting a moment for the reassuring words that did not flow readily. "He so seldom goes away from home; and of course he feels leaving his snakes, and being obliged to give up work for days. Daddy is never happy unless he is working. We are making experiments in snake poisons," she added explanatorily, turning her grave eyes upon Gilmore. "He has almost discovered an antidote which if you were bitten by a death adder would save your life."

"That must be an awful good antidote, miss," said the Yahoo, opening his lips for the first time. "I should like to get hold of that antidote."

Whereupon followed a discussion upon the venomous reptiles of Australia, and Mr. Medlicott told his story of the bushman, who, camping out, had awakened to find a brown snake coiled upon his chest, and who had lain all night scarcely daring to breathe, till at dawn the slimy thing had crawled away, and the man had risen trembling as with palsy.

"It really is harrowing to one's feelings to see such a man as my friend Gilmore yonder, drinking nothing but Apollinaris water," remarked Mr. Medlicott towards the close of the meal... "You have no reason to distrust this port, Gilmore; I bought it myself. Preparing for the voyage by abstemiousness, eh? Oh, nonsense! You don't mean to tell me that you are really off in the *Cawarra* to-morrow? Mrs. Bonamorris, we can't

think of allowing it. Miss Rolt, exercise your powers of persuasion, and make him promise to stay for our races next week. Would you believe it? I said to him yesterday, 'What should you think of a fellow who invited another fellow to come and stop as long as he liked at the finest place on the Ubi Downs; to look at the best sport in the district; to meet the jolliest set of men, and dance with the prettiest girls to be found in any part of Australia?' 'Why!' he answered, 'I should call that fellow a brick.' 'Then I'm your man,' said I; and hang it, if he was not obstinately determined after all that. Now, Ginevra, see what you can do."

Ginevra looked seriously at Gilmore.

"I never was at races in my life," she said. "I don't know what they are like."

"The best fun going," exclaimed Mr. Medlicott, "especially on the Ubi,—Newmarket is nowhere in comparison with Birrali."

"I cannot dance," continued Ginevra.

"Yes—you can," rejoined Mr. Medlicott. "I've seen you assisting at a Corroboree—not in native war paint," he added with a laugh.

Ginevra blushed, and Gilmore hastened to observe that if it were possible for him to put off his departure, the prospect of waltzing with Miss Rolt would be the crowning inducement to do so; but unfortunately it was not possible.

Mr. Medlicott shook his head incredulously, and rallied Gilmore upon his accession to the dignity of landed proprietorship. Presently a general move was made into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Medlicott and Mrs. Bonamorris settled down to bézique; the old maid produced her crewel-work; the squatter composed himself to sleep over the *Leichardt's Town Chronicle*, and the Victorian speculator and the sugar-grower entered into a discussion upon intercolonial rivalry and the future federation of Australia.

Ginevra Rolt noiselessly withdrew; but ere long returned, with a white woollen cloud over her arm, and flitted into the garden, which was long and narrow and terminated at the lower end in a thick grove of banana trees. Near the house it was all abloom with roses and lilies and feathery deutzia. Two yucca trees proudly reared their crowns of waxen bells. The bamboos rustled softly, and every now and then there sounded the light flutter of falling leaf or flower. It was

almost dusk, but the moon was rising and the sun had not long set, so that garden and river were bathed in a tender afterglow. The red roses drooped their fragment hearts. Ginevra tried to gather one, but pricked her fingers, and a drop of blood rose, crimson as the blossoms.

Colonel Gilmore was smoking his cigar while he paced meditatively among the shrubs that decorated Mrs. Bonamorris's grass plat. Seeing Ginevra, he moved towards her, and plucked and presented the coveted rose.

She accepted it, smiling; and he felt distinct satisfaction at seeing her pin it into the front of her dress.

"It is delightful out of doors to-night," he tritely remarked by way of opening conversation.

"Yes," replied Ginevra; "and there are fewer mosquitoes than within. I think it is hotter here than at Birrali; but there, we are higher up among the mountains."

"Birrali is your home?" asked Gilmore.

Ginevra nodded.

"I was there for some months when I first arrived in Australia—at Mr. Medlicott's station. It is strange that I should not have met your father."

"Not at all strange. Daddy knows no one in the district except Mr. Medlicott, and he is not often at Birrali."

"Dr. Rolt is absorbed in the studies which have made his name well known in England. I little thought when first I read one of his works that I should ever have the honour of talking to his daughter."

Ginevra looked up quickly, a pleased yet wistful expression upon her face.

"It is an honour to be his daughter," she said softly. "That ought to make any girl happy."

He longed to inquire if she were not happy. She moved on a few paces, and he joined her, holding his cigar, which he had removed from his mouth.

"I ought to ask whether you dislike my smoking."

"Oh no," answered Ginevra, looking surprised at the question. Nevertheless he threw the cigar from him, and drew her into conversation by some remarks upon her journey, to which she responded with the frankness of a child, full of wonder at the new impressions which her mind had lately received.

"Are those lights yonder?" she asked, pointing to the

irregular row of starlike lamps beyond the river. "And listen to those strange noises; what do they mean?"

"They are the calls of the ferrymen," replied Gilmore, as long hoarse shouts of "Yoi—A hoi—O-o-over"—floated across the water.

"How strange it seems!" murmured Ginevra. "I am longing for to-morrow that I may see everything. Mrs. Medlicott is going to take me to the town to buy me dresses and gloves and shoes, and all kinds of things. Isn't it humiliating to confess that I have never travelled on a railway, never seen a theatre, never sailed in a ship, that I can remember—that Yerangil, Birrali, and books mean the world to me? And to-morrow you may be on your way to England."

"Should you like to be going there too?" asked Gilmore.

"Not without my father," she answered quickly; "and it would grieve me to say good-bye for ever to my mountains."

"There are finer mountains and lovelier scenes in Europe."

"Perhaps I shall see them some day. Yes, I do long to feel, to know the influences which have made other lives noble and beautiful, and which have inspired all that is highest in the world."

Gilmore looked at her with wonder, vague sadness, and faint amusement at the lofty expressions which were out of harmony with her childlike demeanour.

"You must remember that here you may have been saved from exposure to base influences which curse and kill what is best in humanity. Don't regret that Nature has been your nurse."

Ginevra was silent for a moment. Then she said:

"You have been in Australia for some years. Are you sorry to leave it?"

"No," exclaimed Gilmore impulsively. "My life here has been an imprisonment during which I have counted every day that seemed to bring me nearer release. I have always detested Australia—till to-night."

"It would be strange if you could detest any place upon such an evening as this," answered Ginevra seriously. "You might as reasonably say that you disliked this rose," and she touched the flower in her dress.

They paused. Gilmore's eyes rested upon her with a long look of admiration. The strange mixture in her, of gravity,

childishness, and transcendentalism, stirred in his breast an interest to which he had long been a stranger. She, too, turned her glance upon him, but it drooped with a maidenly consciousness that she had never known before. Though not a young man Gilmore possessed a charm of his own; and there was a certain fire in his eyes which contrasted attractively with his listless manner and Vandyke face.

"Ah!" sighed he, "to know that roses, like Siebel's flowers, are doomed to wither at one's touch is sufficient reason for turning away from their fragrance. But," he added, in a different tone, "you who know Australian life only under its most pleasing aspect, must wonder that I should look upon it with abhorrence; but I have been too long exposed to the baser influence of old world civilization to be readily purified by companionship with nature only, exalting as that may be. I like society, the friendship of refined women, the intercourse with men of my own calibre. I confess that luxury is pleasant to me, and rough work, bad food, and hard lying utterly distasteful; and my life has not been so profitable or so happy, my future is not so hopeful, that I can find consolation in my own thoughts. Judge then. Is it likely that the career of a squatter on the Barcoo should have much charm for me?"

"I suppose not. I have read of the life in Europe—such as you may perhaps have led. But you think very differently to my father. He might win fame in England if he chose; but he despises such honour, and often says that his object in coming to Australia was to escape from the world."

"True! but it is not every man's distinction to be born with genius. It's a copybook truth that the thing most to be desired is to be sufficient to one's self."

"Oh, do you think so?" cried Ginevra eagerly. "No; that doctrine is cold and narrowing. To be happy, one must love something or some one better than one's self."

"You are right," answered Gilmore softly. "The most perfect happiness, if it could be realized, would be the blending of one's being with that of another."

There was a brief pause. The night was deepening and the fireflies flitting from shrub to shrub. To break the slight embarrassment which had fallen upon them, Gilmore made some remark about the shortness of the twilight as compared with the northern gloaming.

"I suppose that you have travelled in many parts of the world," said Ginevra.

"I know Europe pretty well; and I have been in Egypt and the Holy Land and India."

"India!" repeated Ginevra. "I was born there."

"Indeed!" said Gilmore; "and do you remember your birthplace?"

"Oh no. Everything is a blank, except confused impressions of hideous black faces, and of one other face, which I try, oh so vainly! to recall. I was only six when we came to Birrali; and my mother was dead then. Daddy will never speak of that past time. He seems to wish that it should be forgotten. I sometimes think," she continued dreamily, and with an inflexion of melancholy in her tone which her companion noted, "that the loss of my mother must have saddened his life and changed his character. I can understand the misery of finding one's self utterly lonely, after having lived and worked for a second self."

"You say that you can enter into this feeling," said Gilmore tenderly. "Are you then sometimes lonely?"

"No; at least very seldom. But one can understand a feeling without having experienced it in one's own person. I should be wicked and ungrateful if I allowed myself to be lonely. Daddy fills my life, though I play so small a part in his."

"And have you never been at school? Has no one taught you or cared for you? Have you always lived alone with your father?"

Ginevra laughed with faint amusement. "You fancy that I am badly educated! Mrs. Medlicott says there are few girls who have been taught as much as Daddy has taught me. I wished to learn that I might be of use to him. Why, I can construe Latin and Greek I dare say almost as well as you yourself, Colonel Gilmore. I have read hundreds of books—books upon almost all subjects. I know a good deal about plants and animals; about chemistry, and physiology, and philosophy. I have always helped Daddy with his experiments; and as for poisons—it might perhaps be possible for me to invent a modern *aqua Tofana*."

"Your face will be a surer passport to favour than the list of your acquirements," said Gilmore; "and if your eyes do not belie your heart, love is sweeter to you than learning."

Ginevra turned away and plucked idly at the leaves of a shrub of scented verbena; then with a movement of unconscious coquetry she threw her scarf over her head and looked round at him half shyly, half invitingly.

"Don't you think that it would be very pleasant to go for a walk?" she said with innocent frankness. "I am accustomed to running wild at home; and all day I have been sitting cramped in the buggy; and we shall only have two days in Leichardt's Town, so that I want to make the most of my opportunities. As we drove here to-day, we passed by some cliffs from which one would, I think, look down upon the river and the town. It is only a short distance from here, and the moon makes the night as clear as day. Will you come?"

As she spoke, she half opened a little gate which led into the road. The swaying leaves overhead cast delicate shadows upon her face and neck, and seemed to deepen the dimples about her lips. She looked like a happy child ripe for harmless escapade. The street was silent and deserted. Gilmore looked at it, then at her, and for a moment hesitated. But a moonlight stroll in the company of this curious bewitching girl was a temptation too potent to be resisted, and he had never in his life been deterred by fine scruples from taking advantage of a proffered pleasure.

"Can I not get you something warmer to put on?" he asked with a glance at her white dress and lightly covered head.

"Would you like a poncho?" she rejoined mockingly. "Does one need to be wrapped up on a night like this?"

CHAPTER III.

AN APPEAL TO DESTINY.

GINEVRA and Gilmore went out together into the irregular street, which, save for the moon's rays, was lighted only by the gleams issuing from the open windows at either side.

Ginevra glided on, somewhat in advance of her companion, her free, lithe movements resembling those of some graceful

animal. Now she would pause to gather a flower growing upon some garden palisade, now to peer mischievously into some projecting casement which offered opportunity for undetected investigation.

"Two old men playing cribbage and drinking brandy-and-water, and a young woman darning stockings," commented she, after one of these prying surveys. "Colonel Gilmore, I am like Hans Andersen's duckling. I am making observations upon the world. The ugliness of its inhabitants strikes me more forcibly than anything else at present. Why isn't it a law of nature that human beings, like flowers, should be always beautiful? The commonest weed has some charm. Oh, here is a promise of more interesting material. I see the shadow of a profile—and a regular profile—upon the white wall of that room. There is a lady within. Now, pray don't remonstrate; remember I have had so few opportunities for studying my kind."

Gilmore halted in his half-uttered protest. They had reached the brow of the hill, and were standing opposite a small cottage surrounded by oleander, and separated by a narrow strip of garden from the road. A sashed window was thrown wide open, and the light inside partially revealed a scantily furnished sitting-room. The path leading to the entrance was overshadowed by shrubs. Along this, Ginevra sped, and sheltering herself against the wall screened her head by a loose trail of jessamine while she peeped cautiously in at the casement.

Gilmore, standing in the street, lit another cigar, while he watched her movements with an interest which was becoming piquant.

There was a rustle of drapery in the room. Ginevra, in her eagerness, leaned perilously forward. Gilmore heard the sound of a suppressed cry; and as Ginevra retreated behind the shrubs, a woman appeared for an instant at the window, gazed with wild eyes into the garden and vanished. The lamp was extinguished and darkness mocked curiosity.

But momentary as had been the glimpse of the strange face, it had startled Gilmore into betraying something like emotion.

"Good God!" he ejaculated. "How like!" He made a hasty step forward as though he would at once have proved the identity of the apparition, then recollected himself, and laughed shortly. "Impossible," he murmured. "Such a

woman does not come so soon to a hovel like this. What should she be doing here? Oh that I could undo the past and root her from my memory as I have rooted her from my life—but it is impossible. . . . She has been in my brain all the evening. Something in that girl's way reminds me of her. . . . "

"That girl" herself stood beside him. There was a ripple of amusement upon her face, blending with an expression of awakened interest, almost awe.

"I have frightened her. She looked towards the window and saw my eyes and screamed. I wonder if she thought I was a ghost. There are people who believe in spirits. But it was an adventure worth the risk of discovery. Colonel Gilmore, did you notice her face?—find fault with me if you choose for rushing at hasty conclusions. I retract everything; there *are* beautiful women in the world—a face with large dark eyes, fiery and yet sad, lips curved downwards, and very arched brows."

"Arched brows," murmured Gilmore involuntarily. "I am haunted to-night. The shadowy resemblance lies there."

"What were you saying?" asked Ginevra.

"I beg your pardon. A thought flashed through my mind. Pray go on describing this vision of loveliness."

"I have done. If you did not remark her beauty I only waste my breath. Words will not describe it. This too is a vision of loveliness—of another kind," she added, stretching out her hands towards the sombre disk of garden and shadowy town with its many lights like twinkling stars, bordered by rocky banks and distant hills, while below their feet the cliff inclined in shrub-grown slopes and abrupt ledges to the river, a clear dark band across which the moon shed golden streaks.

But Gilmore's eyes were upon his companion.

"Angels are abroad to-night," he said with bold tenderness.

Ginevra's answering laugh was silvery and unconscious. "And they have left open the gates of Paradise," she rejoined. Then she added with sudden gravity: "Do you believe in angels? Do you believe in heaven and hell, and the things they talk about in such places as that?" She waved her hand towards a church which stood alone and stately upon the cliff.

"I consider myself a broad-minded person," said Gilmore, "and since it is the fashion, am quite willing to disown a

belief in hell; but I have faith in religion—I almost wish I had not."

"And *I* wish that I had," said Ginevra solemnly. "It must be beautiful to think that the soul does not die, and that we may love and be happy in another world. It is a grand myth—oh that it were truth! But the faith of the multitude meant the myths of the philosopher even in the old time. . . . Don't you ever think when you are in those places"—she again indicated the church by a backward movement of her head—"of the dead gods and their rites? A thousand years hence people may be talking and writing of the Christians and their strange ceremonies."

"Great heavens, child!" cried Gilmore, startled into seriousness. "Have you been taught nothing more satisfying than this?"

"Are *you* satisfied?" she asked earnestly.

"No; but I am not good. I wish I were, so that I might be fit to teach you faith. I have known women, and men also, to whom religion has been the deepest reality."

"It is superstition," said Ginevra, "and superstition except when it is shown in poetry and allegories must degrade the mind. That is what my Daddy has taught me; and I must believe what he believes, and condemn what he condemns. He is full of deep thought and earnest purpose. It is his mission to serve Humanity." Her grandiloquent words sounded almost comical in contrast with her child-like face. "As for me——" She broke off a twig of the scented gum from a sapling near her and crumpled the leaves in her fingers. "Perhaps when I am older and wiser I shall feel it the most desirable immortality to have my being merged into the great Fountain of Life. I don't know. . . . But now . . . Oh, I cannot live, butterfly-like, in the enjoyment of the passing hour. I want to feel that I have a soul. Science is cold; and Nature is unsatisfying; and my heart craves warmth. I have a million ideas bubbling in my mind. Life is only worth what one can do in it for the people one loves; and I can do so little. . . ." Suddenly she paused, and with the variableness which characterized her talk, launched into another subject. "There is a boat moored down there," she cried; "oh, do you think that it belongs to any one? Could we not get into it and row about?"

She gathered up her dress, and sprang like a fawn from

rock to rock, till she reached the zigzag path which led sideways down to the river. Upon a grassy plateau stood a lonely boat-shed. Tied to a stake was a tiny dingy, which, the tide being high, lay level with the bank.

Ginevra stepped into it—all her seriousness vanished; and beckoned to Gilmore to follow her.

He obeyed without demur. Susceptible as a youth of twenty to the influence of charm and beauty, his pulses were already tingling with an indefinable excitement. What so easy as to unloose the dingy and drift with Ginevra down the stream? To a surety that concealing scarf, which she had thrown about her head and shoulders, would be removed to give her arms free play; and the enchanting curves and dimples would be again revealed in the moonlight.

He untied the rope and slowly unshipped the oars.

"I am afraid that the seat is a little damp," he diplomatically observed. "Let me put down my coat for you to make a cushion of."

"Oh no, I can take this off."

Heigh presto! The nun-like drapery had disappeared; and as he pushed off the boat, Ginevra placed herself opposite him, her head bare and ruffled, her round white throat rising like the pistil of a lily from its bed of petals.

"We will row down stream," said Gilmore. "I will land you at the steps in Mrs. Bonamorris's garden, and will bring back the dingy here."

Ginevra nodded contentedly; and leaned forward swaying herself gently to and fro in luxurious enjoyment of the arrowy motion, as they glided swiftly through the water.

"This is very delightful, said Ginevra, drawing a long breath of enjoyment, and adding after a pause, "You are an ideal boatman, Colonel Gilmore. I have only one improvement to suggest."

"What is it?" he asked, resting on his oars.

"I am ashamed to mention it. *Do* you think you could go on again presently, and *take longer strokes?* You have known me somewhere about two hours, and yet you must already have discovered that I like to rush through life—fast—fast—yes, so. At present my idea of perfect bliss—let me remark that it is only founded upon imagination—is to travel in a train going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. I am not likely to realize it in Australia."

"Or anywhere else," observed Gilmore. "Does that suit you?"

"Admirably—now you can rest a little."

"I should like to waltz with you," said Gilmore deliberately.

"Ah!" rejoined Ginevra mournfully, "why has no one ever taught me?"

"Let me teach you," cried Gilmore eagerly.

"There is not much time for acquiring that accomplishment, or any other, between this time and to-morrow morning, unless indeed you were to give me a lesson to-night in Mrs. Bonamorris's drawing-room, after every one has gone to bed. Oh, that is delicious!" as he made several swift strokes; "but pray do not let me be late. I should never forgive myself if I kept Daddy waiting. He can never get to sleep unless I read to him for half an hour when he is in bed. Will you tell me how I am to steer?"

"Nearer the middle. No; there is a steamer coming, and we had better keep out of the swell. It would not take much to overturn this cockle-shell, and I don't want to bring our short acquaintance to a tragic conclusion."

"At any rate we should have had a good time together," said Ginevra.

"It *has* been a good time, has it not?" said Gilmore, slackening speed and fixing his eyes upon her. "I shall carry away at least *one* happy recollection of Australia."

Ginevra blushed, and for the first time trembled shyly beneath his admiration. The magic moment had come. The intoxication of love works quickly. It was, though she knew it not, a crisis in her emotional history. Her eyelids drooped. The rose-red deepened in her cheeks.

Love, save such as she had read of in poetry and romance, or in the pages of classic authors, from which her pure soul had shrunk, repelled and uncomprehending, was an undreamed-of experience in the forest where most of her seventeen years had been passed.

Gilmore noted the blush, and a strange feeling of awe crept over him. It was as though the white dove of innocence had hovered, spreading its guardian wings about her head.

She stooped over the side of the boat with the woman-like instinct of hiding the sweet confusion which bewildered her. Dropping her hand in the water, she dabbled softly, while for some moments the night seemed perilously silent.

"Hoy—ahoy there!" shouted a boatman at the ferry. And then the ding-ding of the bell of a large steamer paddling slowly up the river, recalled Gilmore and Ginevra to the outer world.

The tiny boat was rocked by miniature billows, and falling spray wetted Ginevra's thin gown and made her fair hair glisten. But now again they were in smooth water, and rounding the point beneath the shadow of tall cliffs, where the river was dark and deep, and the moon partially obscured by uprising rocks. Gilmore let the boat drift.

"You were singing in the garden," he said. "Will you not sing now?"

Ginevra thought for a moment; then lifted her head and sent her voice—a clear soprano, bell-like and passionless as the note of a bird, trilling into the night air. And yet it was a strange, tragical ballad that she chose, opening with a measured recitative, in which a lover offers his mistress a goblet of wine and beseeches her to pledge him her troth; while at intervals the strain changed into weird fantastic cadences and took up the warning refrain:

"Drink not— With fierce desire
Thy breast shall glow.
Drink not— For Love is fire
And love is woe."

When she had finished, she dabbled her hand in the water like a tricksy sprite, and sent a shower of pearls flying upward.

"You beautiful child!" cried Gilmore, fascinated with complete forgetfulness of conventional restraint. "Where have you learned your quaint songs and bewitching ways? Fate has played me a cruel trick by throwing us together, now, when I am leaving Australia for ever."

Ginevra, all-unconscious of her power, leaned a little forward, her eyes shining with innocent provocation. "Do not go just yet," she said. "Stay for the races at Birrali—and teach me to waltz."

"You little know how you tempt me. But this would involve postponing my return to England for a month, and writing to-night to Will Cassilis—a cousin of mine—whom I have arranged to meet in Singapore. This in the immediate perpective; but imagine the anger of my relatives, who are doubtless assiduously preparing the fatted calf to greet the

prodigal's return. You don't know, Miss Rolt, how I have risen in the estimation of my father, mother, and brethren generally, since sufficient landed property has been beqeathed me to maintain me in a position of genteel pauperism. That is the utmost which can be said for my inheritance."

"Then if it is so insignificant why hurry to claim it?"

"Insignificant though it be, I cannot afford to treat it with contempt. There are a hundred reasons which I cannot explain, that make it almost necessary for me to be in England before two months are out. Shall I remain? The temptation is powerful. Who knows whether Destiny may not have placed it in my way? Miss Rolt, the burden of decision shall rest with you. I place myself at your disposal. Consult your own pleasure in bidding me go or stay."

"You frighten me with your 'hundred reasons,' and your talk of destiny," cried Ginevra. "I am a fatalist, Colonel Gilmore, and it is my belief that you and I are as surely the victims to blind force as that this flower is bound to go where the current takes it."

She tore from her bosom and tossed into the river the rose which Gilmore had gathered for her. But she had chosen an unlucky moment. The frail thing, borne on for a few seconds by the tide, was caught by a projecting rock and sucked into a tiny whirlpool that eddied beneath the bank.

"What an evil omen!" cried Ginevra. "No; I shrink from the responsibility. You must decide for yourself."

"Then we will invoke the goddess," said Gilmore, with mock solemnity. He produced a coin from his waistcoat-pocket, and shipping his oars, threw it up into the air. "Heads, I go. Tails, I stay. . . . Destiny be praised. Tails has it."

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The boarding-house was still lighted, and Mrs. Medlicott's Roman profile visible through the open window, as she bent over the *bézique* table, when Ginevra Rolt, having left Gilmore in the boat, softly re-entered the house by a side-door and made straight for her father's room.

Here a shaded lamp burned upon the table, and the

Venetian shutters facing the street were closed, seeming to shut out the world with its joys and cares. Books and writing materials lay scattered about; and an atmosphere of study and tranquillity pervaded the apartment.

Dr. Rolt was leaning back in a comfortless arm-chair, with a pamphlet open upon his knee. He was spare and stooping; of a sickly and, at the first glance, forbidding appearance, with a sallow, deeply lined face and massive head. His features were irregular, the nose twisted and curiously long at the point; the upper lip long also and with satirical indentures at the corners; the under one drooping, and the chin rough-hewn; the eyes habitually cast down, but when lifted black and piercing.

He had a look at once reflective and distrustful. His voice—he was reading aloud in a fragmentary manner to himself—was harsh, and his tones usually measured, but occasionally an irritable inflection, or an impatient activity, shown in some slight movement, betrayed the man's natural disposition, kept under by years of self-control and indifference to commonplace matters.

He was reading in a late number of one of the magazines, an article of deep interest to him, which had been written by one of the advanced thinkers of the day. Beside him lay a note-book in which he jotted down rough memoranda. He himself was in the habit of contributing to Positivist literature, and had waged printed battle with more than one theologian. His longer works, few in number, and written during the eleven years of his residence at Birrali, had gained for him considerable reputation in England, where they had been published; but no representations could induce him to emerge from his retreat and take a personal part in the world of literature. His pursuits seemed devoid of sordid or emotional mainspring. He was wealthy, though few knew the fact of his riches, and none positively their source. It was supposed by the few that they had been accumulated in the course of his career in India, and by them he was accredited with miserly propensities, but they were not aware that large sums were privately expended by him, and that the charities in aid of fallen women, both in England and Australia, benefited largely by his bounty.

His daughter, in spite of the affection which she showed him, was a minor element in his life. He was kind to her,

but cold. It had been at her own entreaty that, when she was eleven years old, he had begun to direct her education in such a manner as fitted her to be his assistant and companion. But in their intercourse there was always on his side something cynical and suggestive of mere toleration. He had never admitted her into the innermost recesses of his heart or mind, had never allowed her to consider his labours as a definite aim for herself, often impressing upon her that science can furnish no sphere for a woman. Ginevra herself tacitly conceded that her interest in these severe studies was more emotive than abstract, and arose from her vain longing to follow the current of her father's inner life, and the necessity growing year by year more compelling, to blend her own being with that of another.

While he was yet unaware of her approach, she stood wistfully looking at him, and hesitated for a moment on the threshold of the chamber, becoming suddenly sensible of the chill which she often vaguely felt in her father's presence—that airlike barrier which so frequently divides the loving from the loved.

But Ginevra had never yielded to—had barely admitted—this indefinable consciousness. She spoke now, with almost beseeching tenderness.

"Daddy, I am afraid that it is past ten. I am very sorry that I am late. I hope you have not missed me."

"No, my dear. I had not thought of you. This article on *Thought Waves* has interested me. It opens up several channels for inquiry. I sometimes wish——" He paused and sighed deeply.

"What do you wish, Daddy?" asked Ginevra affectionately.

"That life were longer. I am glad that you have been with the Medlicotts. It will do you good to see something of society, even though it be only that of a boarding-house."

"I have not been with the Medlicotts," said Ginevra, blushing slightly.

"You must not imagine that you are tied to my chair," continued Doctor Rolt, not noticing her interruption. "It is fortunate for me that my occupations interest you; but I should prefer that they did not absorb your thoughts."

"I wish that I had been a boy," cried the girl passionately; "I might have been of some use to you then."

"You have an affectionate nature, Ginevra," said the old man with an almost perceptible effort at warmth; "though I must admit that it is a somewhat undisciplined one. Believe me, that as a daughter you leave me nothing to desire."

Ginevra turned away, laid aside her scarf and pushed back her roughened hair. When she spoke again, it was in a different tone.

"Do you care to hear what I have been doing, Daddy? It is a glorious night. There is a full moon. I have been exploring Leichardt's Town, and boating on the river."

"With the Medlicotts?"

"No. If a third person had been in the dingy it must have been swamped to a certainty. I was walking in the garden with a gentleman who is staying here. We went out into the street, and I made him take me to the cliffs from which one sees the river and the town. There was a boat moored at the foot of the rocks. He rowed me back to Mrs. Bonamorris's steps—and the tale is told. I have been extending my knowledge of humanity, Daddy, and have made the discovery that almost every man I meet represents some fresh type. Women are more alike. Already I see points of resemblance between Mrs. Medlicott, the landlady, and Nancy at home. They are all venomous in matters they don't understand, and kind-hearted when one appeals to their sympathy; but between every two of the men in my small world there is as much difference as between a jew-lizard and a bandicoot."

"And of what particular type is this new friend of yours a specimen?" asked Dr. Rolt suspiciously.

"He is an Englishman, but he does not belong to the Medlicott species. In the first place, I am sure that he would think it bad taste, and also not worth his while, to brag. He is middle-aged, and tired-looking. He has a face like Charles the First, and big, melancholy eyes—and he has a—a frank way of looking at one, and of talking as though one were a child. Daddy!" exclaimed Ginevra, coming to an abrupt pause in her description as her eye was caught by the address upon a sealed envelope which lay upon the table. "I see that you have written to the doctor."

"I have asked him to come and see me. But go on with the description of your adventure. Who is this gentleman?"

"His name is Colonel Gilmore; and he is a friend of Mr. Medlicott's."

"I am glad of that. But though he treats you as a child, Ginevra, it is not advisable that you should make any more moonlight expeditions in Colonel Gilmore's company. If he wishes to row you on the river again, refuse, unless Mr. or Mrs. Medlicott are of the party."

"Very well. But it was not he who asked me to go. It was a case of the dish running away with the spoon. I made him take me. Now I think of it, he seemed to hesitate for a moment." Ginevra paused. Her father's cold comment had checked her impulsive inclination to give an account of the row, and the appeal to destiny in the matter of Colonel Gilmore's departure. Dr. Rolt closed his magazine, and rose, telling his daughter that he was going to bed and would call her when ready for the usual reading.

Ginevra lit his candle and followed him to his chamber, then returning, lowered the lamp, threw open the Venetian shutters, and drawing forward a chair sat quite still with the soft balmy air breathing upon her face.

The stillness of the room and the manifold traces of her father's grave presence seemed in strange contrast with her late experience. It was as though she had briefly visited another world. And then it seemed to her to wonder whether she too were out of harmony with all those pleasures and interests which made up the lives of those around her, and whether Colonel Gilmore had been struck by this sense of incongruity.

She had been made aware during her intercourse with Mrs. Medlicott and the few squatters' wives and daughters whom she was allowed to visit, that the pursuits which constituted her mind's daily food were unknown to the majority of her sex. She had sometimes dimly yearned for a share of earth's common joys; but never had the craving for human love, human sympathy, asserted itself so strongly as to-night.

"I am lonely, I am lonely," rang the cry of her heart. It needed more substantial sustenance than the abstracted caresses, the meagre tenderness conveyed in such words as: "You are a good child, Ginevra. Ginevra, you have done well, I am pleased with you; go now and bid David take you for a ride"—the warmest return which her devotion to her father ever elicited. This had always been her lot—to be taught, made use of, scantily commended, held, as it were, at arm's length, and dismissed—never given the deep, sweet

fellowship for which her nature hungered. So, at such moments as the present, she inwardly complained.

But her tendencies were not morbid, and at most times she was ready to believe herself happy and privileged in being permitted to minister to the wants of one so worthy of admiration as her father. Then, too, there was joy in the wild free manner of living, in the close intercourse with nature, in the solitary rambles and inspiriting gallopsacross the plains and through the grand, lonely bush, in the imaginative day-dreams, with which, by means of her varied reading, she made life rosy. She was too young to look far into the future, or to speculate profoundly upon woman's destiny. Her natural vivacity and fund of animal spirits enabled her to extract a full meed of enjoyment from the uneventful present.

Ginevra sat musing, her thoughts fashioning themselves to the rhythmic plash of oars, her memory unconsciously reproducing Gilmore's looks and words. It was nearly an hour before her father's summons came. He was in bed, and held the book with the place in it already marked. Ginevra seated herself a little way from him, and shading the light so that no ray fell upon his face, began her task.

The volume which he had chosen contained a collection of Voltaire's short philosophical pieces. At first, her delivery was mechanical, but gradually as she became interested in the subject matter, her voice grew animated, and her fresh tones lent themselves with an earnestness which was almost pathos, to the biting logic and pitiless persiflage of the master philosopher.

In curious congruity with the play of events that evening, it chanced that her reading ended with the terse caustic essay *Sur le Destin.*

* * * * * *

Before he went to his bedroom Gilmore had a short conversation with Mr. Medlicott.

The latter was pacing one of the gravel-walks in Mrs. Bonamorris's garden when the Englishman returned after having re-moored the dingy at the place from which it had been temporarily stolen.

"Hullo, Gilmore!" cried Mr. Medlicott. "Come and take a stroll before turning in; I have a crow to pick with you," he added in a tone of subdued banter. "Here I am loafing

about in the hope of escaping a curtain lecture—all for not looking sharper after our pretty little friend. What business had you to go gallivanting with Ginevra Rolt upon the river? You see I know all about it—saw you land her at the steps,—he, he, he!" Mr. Medlicott's laugh was a flourish with which he adorned the conclusion of most of his sentences.

"It was a very innocent excursion," said Gilmore coldly, and wincing he scarcely knew why. "Miss Rolt wished to look at Leichardt's Town from the cliff yonder, and I rowed her back round the point."

"Poor little Ginevra! Well, what do you think of her? Isn't she a pretty child?—and something out of the common?"

"Yes," answered Gilmore slowly, "she is very much out of the common—so much so, that I should like to see more of her."

"What so easy? Come to my races next week, and let the *Cawarra* steam off to-morrow without you."

"Exactly what I have determined to do."

"You don't mean it!" cried Mr. Medlicott exultingly. "And it is little Ginevra who has upset all your plans. Are you serious, Gilmore?"

"Serious—in what way?"

"In your intentions, as the heavy stage father would observe. I feel some responsibility about the matter. Ginevra is practically unprotected, and, socially speaking, I consider myself her guardian. She has attracted you. She is very pretty, and full of feeling, and as dear innocent a child as ever breathed. If you are only coming to Birrali to flirt with her for a week and then to ride away, I'll be hanged if I have anything to do with you."

Gilmore took out a cigar and lighted it. "You have a very bad opinion of me, Mr. Medlicott," he said presently.

"Well, my dear fellow, you must admit that I have no reason to entertain an exalted one—at least as regards your relations with women."

"Perhaps not. At any rate your mind may be at rest on this subject. What do you suppose that a man could feel in the presence of one so pure—so gifted, but the deepest humility—the most profound regret? You were talking to me last night about my wasted opportunities, and the possibilities now before me of making a fresh start in life. You and my mother had been discussing the subject, and that gave

you a sort of right to broach it to me. Otherwise, I might have resented your frankness, though Heaven knows, I would have given much during my six years' exile on the Barcoo, for the power of opening my mind to any one who would have offered me the least sympathy. I have sown my wild oats, and reaped the harvest. Six months ago life seemed a hopeless business. I should have taken to drink or committed suicide if I had remained much longer at Talooma."

"You are not the sort of stuff to make a good western squatter," remarked Mr. Medlicott in a tone of cheerful condolence. "It was not in you to skin your diseased beasts and hawk about the hides as I did, sir, in my early days. Fact, I assure you; I told the story to the lord-lieutenant of my county at my own table not long ago, and Lord! how my wife scolded me. There was a deal of money, Gilmore, to be made out of that Barcoo station, if you had known how to set about it: but England is your line, the country gentleman and magistrate business, fox-hunting, heavy dinners, domestic happiness, etc., varied by an occasional run up to London and rubber of whist at *Arthur's*—all that sort of thing, don't you know? But you won't be able to cut a great figure if you depend entirely upon the Little Fretterly rent-roll. You must marry—and marry well."

"It is my wish to marry," replied Gilmore seriously. "That is part of the plan of life which I have chalked out for myself."

"Then," exclaimed Mr. Medlicott enthusiastically, "you must marry Ginevra Rolt. Here is your heiress already to hand. I am not chaffing, and if I don't mistake, the idea has already occurred to you. I am the Doctor's confidential adviser, and know something about his private affairs. Ginevra will have at least fifty thousand pounds, and this at seven per cent. in colonial securities would yield a nice little income. Oh, there is no doubt about the money! I wish I were as sure that wool would go up a penny a pound next sales. But I am not serious when I speak in this mercenary fashion; I am anxious to see Ginevra well married, for I am fond of the little girl, and between ourselves I don't think the old philosopher is long for this world. It would be a good stroke of business for you; but unless I were convinced that she would never regret it, I would lend no hand in the matter."

"I am almost old enough to be her father," said Gilmore thoughtfully.

"That counts for nothing. My experience of romantic girls has shown me that they always lavish the most devoted love upon men twice their age. You say that your wild oats are sown; we citizens of the world know that the process must be gone through sooner or later. I don't think that I should hesitate to entrust you with the happiness of a daughter of my own if I had another to marry, which, thank Heaven, is not the case. The most serious of your escapades, Gilmore, was that Indian business. Close though you kept matters, it might have lasted a long time. Lord! what a fright your father and mother were in lest you should marry the woman. By the way, I never heard who she was—and how glad they were when your money affairs came to a crisis and they could ship you off to Australia."

"There was never any question of a divorce. Had there been I should have married her," said Gilmore, drawing back as though Mr. Medlicott's rough words had inflicted a wound. The thought passed through his mind that he must indeed have fallen low, before he could permit his most private interests to be discussed by a man with whose mind his own was so little in unison. In his reactionary impulse he despised himself for having been so ready to seek sympathy. It seemed an insult to Ginevra that he should even have alluded to his dawning hopes—that her name should have been coupled, however distantly, with any episodes in his past career. "Pray speak respectfully of that—that lady," he said almost angrily, "or do not speak of her at all. The affair was all done with before I left England. I settled what I could upon her, and——"

"And the children—there were two, weren't there? Poor little devils! Well, it is the way of the world, and I suppose bygones ought to be bygones. What do you say to turning in now? My cigar is out, and I am a little afraid of the river damp. I hope that I may find my better half asleep."

The two men separated; and Gilmore went to his bedroom, where he set himself to the task of writing to his cousin in Singapore.

It was one of some difficulty. The partitions in Mrs. Bonamorris's house were only of wood; his room adjoined that of

Dr. Rolt, and through the thin wall he could hear Ginevra's silvery tones as she read her father to sleep.

He held his pen in his hand while he listened. Every now and then he would catch detached words, and racked his brain in speculating upon the context. At last, with a feeling of desperation, he began his letter.

It was not such as he had intended to pen. In one of those strange contradictions of human nature to which the emotional are liable, though his heart was touched with reverence and his mind filled with pure tender yearnings which made the recollections his letter invoked hateful to him, he wrote in a flippant style totally at variance with his real mood.

"Leichardt's Town, November 10th.

"DEAR WILL,

"All my plans for starting by the Eastern and Australasian boat to-morrow were made and have been overthrown in the course of a few hours, by—will you give up hope of me when you read?—a pretty face.

"There is a charming girl here—young, lovely, and fascinating, the daughter of Rolt the philosopher, whose works I have heard you admire—and the quaintest and most bewitching compound possible to conceive of ignorance and erudition, frankness and sensibility, sweetness, dignity, and unconventionality.

"You don't know this place. Like all Australian towns, in the day-time it is odious; but at night—the roses are in bloom, the bamboos cast strange shadows, the datura hangs its heavy waxen bells—the air is full of intoxicating fragrance. There is a river broad and blue which winds round low-lying points and beneath overhanging cliffs. Here I rowed with my enchantress in the moonlight, and she sang to me like a Lorelei beneath the rocks till the spell was complete.

"There is my confession. You see that in some natures passion will never die out, but always leaves a smouldering spark ready to leap into fresh flame.

"The E. and A. boat for next month's service is such a damnable old tub that I shall probably go home *viâ* San Francisco. In that case our rendezvous falls through; but from what I know of Singapore, I don't imagine that you will endure the climate and the monotony for many months

longer, and shall look forward to seeing you in England during the course of next year.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"BRIAN GILMORE."

"P.S.—You remember Medlicott of Champneys, who at my mother's suggestion constituted himself my Mentor during my first year of life in Australia. He is out here now, more insufferably pretentious, but as kind-hearted as ever. The old philosopher Rolt appears to be a misanthropic invalid, and the Medlicotts seem to have assumed the guardianship of his daughter."

When Gilmore had finished the letter, he read it over, and with an exclamation of disgust made a movement as though he would have torn it in two. But another impulse seized him. He closed the envelope, and directed it to—

Dr. WILLIAM CASSILIS,
Hotel de l'Europe,
Singapore.

Then took up his hat intending to go out and post it.

Ginevra's voice was still audible. Gilmore listened again; a detached phrase caught his ear.

"*Jouets de la destinée!*" he repeated as he left the room. "It is true. We are bound to float whither the current bears us."

CHAPTER V.

IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS.—THE CORD TOUCHED.

IN Ginevra's dreams that night there was an odd medley of Voltaire and Tennyson, of solemn mediæval pageants and wild forest scenes, of rippling water and notes of mellow bass. When she awoke these words fell unconsciously from her lips—

"*Dark, splendid, speaking in the silence, full of noble things.*"

"He is like Lancelot," she whispered to herself, as in

hackneyed fashion many another maiden may have whispered of the man by whom her innocent fancy has been first captivated.

There was in her being a sweet fantastic tumult of wonder whether he would go or stay; of vague expectancy; of mysterious thrills, and unbidden tender impulses. Reality became enveloped in nebulous clouds of delicious possibilities. She did not know what had transformed life, but only felt vaguely that it had been touched by a magician's wand. In the air of her narrow chamber seemed soft murmurings and heavenly music, and there floated, as it were, a moral perfume subtle and penetrating as the scent of orange flowers borne upon a balmy Mediterranean breeze.

She dressed early; and it being her father's habit to breakfast alone on a cup of chocolate, carried the tray herself to his bedside. Thus she was able to join the other boarders at the public table. All but one were there; and yet it seemed to Ginevra that the room was empty. Gilmore was absent. Had he then gone? A pang rent Ginevra's heart, but she was too brave and too proud to wince. In Mr. Medlicott's manner of greeting her there was a certain grave kindness which assimilated with the new phase of feeling into which she had passed. It was not natural that things and persons should be to-day quite as they had appeared yesterday.

Mr. Medlicott read with a thoughtful air a note from Dr. Rolt which Ginevra handed him. It made an appointment for a "business interview" that afternoon. The doctor was coming, but Ginevra had been kept in ignorance of the time arranged for his visit. It was as though a plot had been concocted to secure her removal from the scene. Mrs. Medlicott was full of suggestions as to the purchases to be made in the morning, and proposed that in the afternoon they should stroll in the Botanical Gardens, and view other places of interest, in order that Ginevra might see as much as possible during her stay in town, which was not to extend beyond the morrow. Shopping was hot work upon this bright November day; but sufficiently fascinating to absorb all the young girl's faculties. When gowns, laces, and gloves had been bought, when she had heaped up ribbons and finery upon the counter, had allowed her slim figure to be tightened by French corsets, and her pretty feet to be encased in French

boots, she was taken by Mrs. Medlicott to luncheon at the house of a friend of the latter; and from thence they walked a party of three to the Gardens.

It was, however, destined to become a quartette, for as they sauntered through the long bunya tree walk, they came suddenly upon Colonel Gilmore.

Looking handsome and bored, he was leaning against the trunk of an acacia, while he idly pelted with fallen seed-pods, a nomad mongrel which having strayed, against the rules, into the garden, was fawning at his feet. Gilmore turned at the sound of Mrs. Medlicott's voice, and met the faint flame-signals which rose to Ginevra's cheeks, by a greeting at once tender and deferential. Nevertheless, with commendable gallantry, he devoted himself for a long five minutes to Mrs. Medlicott, and for another five to her friend, then turned to Ginevra, and in the natural order of things fell back with her.

"I hope that you took no harm from last night's expedition."

"That would not have been likely. I am often out late. At home I sometimes wander for hours on the plain by moonlight. It is very beautiful, so still and shadowy, with the mountains rising round it, and cutting the sky with their jagged teeth. Do you know the place, Colonel Gilmore?"

"You mean the plain near Yerangil. Yes; I have ridden over it."

"Were you haunted last night by visions of an avenging Destiny?" he added abruptly.

"Colonel Gilmore," said Ginevra, shyly lifting her eyes to his, "I have a horrible conviction that some day you will pay dearly for challenging Fate as you did yesterday evening."

"Perhaps," replied Gilmore sadly. "Provided that *you* are not involved in the penalty I shall submit to it patiently. There are joys for which one does not grudge the after payment of pain."

They walked on a few paces.

"Then you are not going to sail for England to-day?" said Ginevra.

"Of course not! I meant my appeal last night to be final. The *Cawarra* left this morning, and I, you see, am here. The lines of our lives were not intended to touch merely for one evening; of that I am convinced. Just think, that if you

had come to Leichardt's Town to-day instead of yesterday, a hemisphere would soon have divided us."

Ginevra was silent. For the first time, the living poetry of human action, human fellowship, touched her soul, and blended with the silent romance of nature and of the world of books, which till now had sustained her emotional life. This moment of dawning consciousness, is, in the history of a young girl, a crisis almost as grave as the first confession of love.

Gilmore observed and interpreted her downcast look. His heart throbbed, but he spoke with an affectation of lightness. "Do you know what reason I gave Will Cassilis in my letter last night for not keeping my appointment with him in Singapore? I said that I had been enchanted by the song of an Australian Lorelei. Will you let me take you upon the river again this evening?"

Ginevra shook her head. "I must not go again; Daddy would not like it."

Gilmore looked annoyed. But for Ginevra's frankness he might have suspected that Mrs. Medlicott, upon conventional grounds, had put in her protest.

"Was your father vexed with you for leaving him?" he asked tentatively.

"No," replied Ginevra; "he is never angry. I wish sometimes that he were; I wish that he took sufficient interest in my actions to be annoyed at them. . . . Have you a father?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes; he is gouty, irascible, and selfish. His paternal duties have never weighed very heavily upon him, and have consisted chiefly in the free administration of abuse. Still, as a parent, I suppose he is entitled to a certain amount of filial affection."

"But you have a mother?"

"Yes; with a heart torn between conventionality and impulse, in which I fear that I have inflicted many stabs. Then I have a half-brother, and two married sisters, and cousins in profusion."

"You are very fortunate in having all these people to love, and to love you. Think what a lonely girl I am with no one but my father."

"How sadly you speak!" cried Gilmore. "You are unhappy? Brave as you are, you feel existence solitary."

He drew a little closer to her. They were walking at this moment upon a miniature islet, densely covered with tree and branching staghorn ferns, cacti, and creeping plants, and closed in from the outer world by tall bamboos, whose swaying branches made gentle melody.

"Tell me what is in your mind," he said. "Friendship should be measured by affinity, not by time. You must know how deeply you have touched me; you hardly realize yourself how your soul yearns for tenderness; but *I* see, *I* know. All my sympathy is yours. I feel that I understand you."

Ginevra looked up at him with grateful eyes which sought to conceal nothing. He was right; her heart, thirsting for affection, stretched out its fibres then.

"You are very good to me," she murmured. "I am glad that you wish to be my friend. I have very few friends. . . . But you must not think that I am unhappy. . . . I will tell you why I am sad sometimes. It is because I feel as though life and belief—and love—all that makes happiness—were far away from me. I seem to be standing on the shore of a great ocean; and I don't know where it leads to, or what is beyond. Don't you understand. There are certain things one knows to be beautiful and good, but they are lost in the vastness; everything seems lost in the wideness and the darkness that closes in round one's eyes, and frightens one. . . ."

"My poor child!" exclaimed Gilmore. To him the lot of this pretty caged bird, fretting unconsciously against the bars of her prison, seemed inexpressibly mournful.

"I sometimes wonder," Ginevra went on dreamily, "what the lives of other girls are like—girls who have mothers to whom they can open their minds and tell every thought of their hearts. I picture my own mother as she might have been; and I feel how I should have loved her. At some moments I could almost fancy that she stood near me. It is impossible to believe that she has no existence—for me; that the love can remain, while she is—nothing. Must love, like life, sink into blankness? That is what seems so hard."

"Let us hope there is a future, where love exists after death," said Gilmore gravely. "You are too young to dwell upon these morbid thoughts! In the present, life ought for you to be so full of interest and happiness."

"I want to be so much to others," said Ginevra; "and I

am so little—I am so little to my father. Suppose," she went on with grave sweetness, "that you were me—that since babyhood you had had only one person to care for, who, though perhaps colder and more reserved than most men, seemed to you so superior to them that you valued a word, a look of tenderness from him, ten-fold more than you would have prized a hundred caresses from any other. . . . And suppose that your aim had been to make yourself his companion; that you had set yourself to study in the hope of growing very near him, as you became older. . . . And that then you saw how it was all of no use—that you would never be more in his eyes than a girl set apart by her sex from doing anything great or noble; and that he was trying to wean you from his interests, and to widen the distance which separated you from him. Should you not, when you dimly realized all this, feel a little sorry?"

"This will not always be so," answered Gilmore gently. "It is the misfortune of your lonely girlhood that it should be thus shadowed. But your father is perhaps wise. He knows that a woman's happiest destiny is to form closer, sweeter ties than those which bind you to him. This is possibly what he desires for you. Your life is, must be, noble. You do not know how, unconsciously, you may brighten the lives of others; how you may awaken in them what is pure and good. Ginevra, try to believe this."

As he called her by her Christian name, Ginevra's eyes drooped, and she stood silent under the spell of a nameless joy. Already a faint excitement, unknown in the old child days, set her nerves quivering.

"Do you not even think of a possible future in which you may not be alone?" continued Gilmore—"a future in which you may be the means of happiness—of redemption to one who would be dear to you? Have you ever thought of love, Ginevra, in which you would give and receive the highest joy?"

Her breath came more quickly, and her lips parted in a wistful smile. Yes; she had dreamed of love as Elaine might have dreamed before her meeting with Lancelot.

"Last night," said Gilmore, "when you sang to me on the water, I thought that your voice needed but one tone to be perfect."

They walked on again, and paused on the rustic bridge

which connected the islet with the garden. "Dear child," he said earnestly, "we are drifting into talk which is perhaps for me presumptuous, for you, now, difficult to understand. But I want you to consider me your friend; I want you to trust me—to confide freely to me your beautiful fancies and misty doubts and vague sorrows, and to rely upon my sympathy. We have talked in an unconventional way which our short acquaintance hardly warrants; but we shall know each other better soon—and I am a man of moods and impulses, and you affect me in a strange way."

"How?" asked Ginevra timidly.

"I cannot tell you now; I have not known you long enough. Perhaps I may tell you at Birrali—some night when the moon is shining, and we two are alone. When I feel that your hand trembles at the touch of mine, and that your heart beats the quicker for my presence, then, Ginevra, if that moment comes, will you listen to me?"

"Ah, do not say any more. I do not know what you mean—I feel that if I were older—wiser, you would be less frank—if this is frankness. . . . But you have told me that I might trust you; that I might tell you all that was in my mind; you have said that you would be my friend."

"I will—your best and truest friend; but must I then *never* speak to you of love?"

"Love!" repeated Ginevra. "Ah, that is hard for me to understand. There is love in romance and poetry, but not in the life of every day; not the love that. . . . If it were true, it should only come once. . . . And one does not wish to live one's life in an hour. One would dream and long, and look forward—not knowing."

Her voice vibrated with struggling passion of which she was all unaware, while a qualm of self-reproach tightened Gilmore's heart, and he drew a little away from her.

"You are right," he said. "Such love should only come once—*can* come but once. You know the theory of the twin souls, long parted, which when they meet in life—and this is not always the case—*must* spring towards and recognize each other, and be for ever united in absolute oneness. If, in their youth, this were borne in more strongly upon the hearts of men and women, there would be less misery in the world—fewer shipwrecked lives."

He paused suddenly; it seemed to Ginevra that his voice

trembled with unwonted feeling. Neither looked at the other; the eyes of both were bent earnestly afar, as though each beheld dimly a revelation of future joy. Before further words could be spoken, Mrs. Medlicott's voice jarringly broke the silence. She perceived Ginevra's embarrassed look, and accounted for it after her own fashion.

"If Colonel Gilmore has been teasing you, my dear, you must remember that Englishmen consider it their privilege to say what they choose to Australian young ladies. Isn't it true, Colonel Gilmore? But they are not so unsophisticated as you seem to fancy; and a very little instruction, as you would have found in the case of my own daughters, enables them to hold their own."

Gilmore's complimentary speech was suitable to the occasion; and under cover of the general laugh, the quartetto again divided, and presently strolled in different couples towards the gate. Here Mrs. Medlicott's friend said good-bye; and Gilmore, upon the plea of inquiring at his club for letters, left the other two ladies to cross the river by the ferry.

The boatman was on the point of pushing off as Mrs. Medlicott and Ginevra descended the ferry-steps. The boat was crowded, but room was made, and Mrs. Medlicott began to interchange greetings with her acquaintances, government officials returning home from their offices, and ladies laden with parcels accumulated during an afternoon's shopping, while Ginevra sat silent and preoccupied, her eyes fixed upon the water.

Suddenly she became aware that a lady, seated opposite, was regarding her intently, and, turning her eyes, started to find herself face to face with the incognita of the cottage upon the hill.

Though viewed apart from the spiritualizing influence of night, moonlight, and romance, this person seemed to Ginevra no less striking than she had appeared upon the previous evening. She was a woman past her first youth, with dark grey eyes, highly arched, and perhaps slightly accentuated brows, a complexion of alabaster fairness, and an element of foreignness and singularity in her look which at once set the mind working in conjectures upon her probable past.

This woman, in spite of the plainness of her well-made clothes, and the quietness of her bearing, might have prompted such a thought.

Now, as she gazed at Ginevra, something sleeping seemed to awaken in her face. She bent forward, struggling emotion upon her lips, eager interest, hope, doubt, shining in her eyes. Then, as though the memory half-invoked had again fled, the light faded and her look changed to one of weary despair.

Fascinated and absorbed, Ginevra gazed too. Instinct told her that the woman was deeply unhappy, and that the sight of her own face had in some mysterious manner stirred painful chords in the stranger's being. Ginevra had all the passionate admiration of an imaginative child for the beautiful. She hardly felt Mrs. Medlicott's light touch upon her arm.

"Ginevra," said that lady stiffly, disapproving of the persistent stare to which her charge was being subjected. "Will you look in my bag for some pence?"

Ginevra obeyed. A flash shot from the stranger's eyes; the corners of her mouth drooped, and she turned away. Presently, the ferry-steps were reached, and the passengers stepped on shore, Mrs. Medlicott leading the way.

A little girl of about seven years old, whose hand the lady held, stumbled and clung to her mother's skirts. Ginevra involuntarily stretched forth her arm to aid the two. To her surprise, she found her fingers convulsively clasped, and the strange lady looked wistfully, almost yearningly, into the girl's face.

"You are called Ginevra," she murmured. "Tell me your surname."

"My name is Rolt—Ginevra Rolt. Do you know me? Why do you look at me in that curious way?"

"No," replied the other faintly. "I do not know you. Forgive my rudeness."

She bowed slightly, and, with a smile that was more sad than sweet, pulled her child's arm. "Come, Ginevra," she said.

"What!" cried Ginevra Rolt in bewilderment. "Her name is the same as mine."

The lady looked back, upon her face Ginevra, in her excitement, fancied an expression of agony. Then both passed, the small creature toddling by its mother's side. Upon the crest of the hill mother and child paused and watched Ginevra Rolt and her companion till they had re-entered Mrs. Bonamorris's boarding-house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LEGACY TO CLÉMENCE FOSGATE.

At the time that Colonel Gilmore accosted Ginevra in the Garden, Mr. Medlicott knocked at the door of Dr. Rolt's private room.

The old man, looking by the broad light more shrivelled, bent, and unprepossessing than upon the night before, was sitting at the table. By his side stood a despatch-box; and some legal-looking documents lay scattered about. His forehead rested upon his hands, and he leaned forward motionless and as though absorbed in painful thought.

Mr. Medlicott entered in his blustering fashion. "Ah, Rolt, my dear sir, here I am as you desired. A difficult matter, I assure you, to escape from Government House. 'Must keep an appointment with an old friend, your Excellency,' I said. I was obliged to tell him your name. 'Rolt! Rolt!' he cried; 'the writer! I *must* see him. Tell me where he is; and if he will not come here I will go myself and call upon him;' and nothing would satisfy Lady Claypole but a promise that Mrs. Medlicott should take little Ginevra to her reception to-morrow. You will let the child go? it is time she saw something of the world."

"You are right," said Dr. Rolt thoughtfully. "But in this instance it is impossible," he added decidedly. "She will have opportunities for entering society later. To-morrow we shall be on our way back to Birrali."

Mr. Medlicott sat down and wiped his face, which was red and hot after his walk. For the first time he looked straight into his companion's eyes.

"Doctor," he said gravely, "is that prudent? Had you not better remain here for a little while and let Mrs. Bonamorris look after you? I don't fancy that you are quite the thing this afternoon."

"The candle is almost burned out," said the philosopher wearily. "I knew that months ago. I have had a long day," he continued. "First the doctor, then the lawyer. I wonder why one must needs trouble so much about temporal affairs when the great blank is so imminent. I am tired. . . . I

suppose," he added, after a moment's pause, "that however stoical a man may imagine himself, there must be an involuntary shrinking when in cold blood he stands face to face with death."

"How? Things are not so bad as all that. Come now; you must not be down-hearted," exclaimed the squatter with concern.

"It is simply fact, and no surprise to me. I have been aware for some time that my heart was affected, but certain complications made me wish to confirm my own opinion by that of a physician here. He has given his verdict, which coincides with mine. A violent shock, or an unusually severe attack of the kind to which I am subject, might at any time cause death. In any case, my life is not likely to be prolonged beyond a year. The reason why I begged your wife to take Ginevra into her charge to-day, and asked you to come to me without fail this afternoon, was that I wished to discuss with you, and to satisfy my mind about, certain matters of importance, before I leave Leichardt's Town. You have promised to be Ginevra's guardian."

"Certainly; and I meant my promise in its fullest sense You may be assured that I will act towards her as I would to a child of my own. That understood, command me as you please. But don't worry over business to-day. I shall not be leaving Australia for the next six months, and there will be time enough to talk over matters at Birrali. I will ride over to the Selection any day you like to name."

"I may never reach Birrali," said Dr. Rolt. "No, no, Medlicott," he continued with feverish energy, "I must beg you to listen now. You may perhaps think it a strange confession, but it is a sincere one, that you are almost the only person in the world to whom I can apply. When I settled at Birrali eleven years ago, I had purposely cut myself adrift from all associations of the past. I wished to absorb myself in science, books, and work; to forget if it were possible, that there could be interests beyond these. It was not difficult to live in my own world while Ginevra was a child, but during the last year or two, a burdensome sense of responsibility and shortcoming has crept over me; and with it a vague notion that I might look to you for relief. Your expansive geniality has seemed a sort of moral leaning-post to a morbid misanthrope like myself. It may surprise you

to hear that I have studied you. To see a man on good terms with himself, his family, and society is a novel experience to me."

Mr. Medlicott nodded and broadened his chest, as he had a fashion of doing whenever complimentary reference was made to his merits or achievements. But at the same time he was attacked by a qualm of uneasiness. Could it be possible that his friend's seclusion had been enforced by discreditable antecedents?

Dr. Rolt seemed to divine his thought.

"Pray do not imagine, as indeed you might be pardoned for doing, that I shun society because I feel myself unworthy to mix with better men than I am. I have never, that I am aware of, sinned against the recorded code of honour. I have received more overtures from the great world than you would perhaps believe possible. My desires, however, have always tended towards a hermit-like existence. Nature did not design me for domestic or social life. But, I suppose, even the most unnatural of the human species may develop some kind of paternal instinct. I suffer occasional pangs upon this scorce; and Ginevra, poor child, is beginning to suspect that her worship is ill bestowed. I have felt for some little time that there must be a change in our mode of living. Now death solves the difficulty; Ginevra must go forth into the world, must have opportunities for marrying."

"Then you wish her to marry," said Mr. Medlicott in the faintly disappointed tone of a man robbed of the credit of a benevolent plan.

"She will do so whether I wish it or not. Is a woman ever content till in happiness or misery she has fulfilled her natural destiny? I want to guard her against possible unhappiness. It is important that Ginevra should choose wisely —in short, that she should be in love with the man she marries."

"You surprise me," murmured Mr. Medlicott in a puzzled manner. He had not suspected Dr. Rolt of sentimentalism.

"Women are incomprehensible beings," continued the latter calmly; "but my slight knowledge of them has convinced me that in matters of affection they are at the same time most credulous and most stable. A wife is rarely unfaithful or harshly unforgiving to a man whom she has once passionately loved. It is sensational curiosity which desolates

married hearths. You look astonished. Why? Because I am a cynic, or because you did not suppose that I had studied human nature?"

"I confess, my dear Rolt, that I did not suspect you of having inquired deeply into this subject."

"I am an impartial analyst. No woman ever loved me with passion. But with regard to Ginevra. She must marry; her temperament requires it. The devotion she lavishes on me is merely a safety-valve. Love is to her a sacred mystery —an unknown sea. She must explore it thoroughly, that there may be no danger of future shipwreck."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Medlicott, "you go a long way in speculations upon possible contingencies. Such ideas in connection with any of my daughters never crossed my mind."

"Probably not," replied Dr. Rolt drily. "It is purely a case of temperament. I presume that a parent who foresees possible peril for his child is in common justice bound to guard her against it. Ginevra will most likely be under your care when the question of her marriage arises. I know how these things are managed in society. A few meetings; the stirring of a girl's unborn fancy; the fluttering of Eve-like curiosity; thoughtless pressure or ill-judged opposition from without; the intoxication of a suitor's homage; the interest of novelty, the excitement of wedding preparations; the crisis —then slow realization; disappointment, weariness, nausea, perhaps a final tragedy. . . . Ginevra will in course of time form some attachment. I make no stipulation as to her field of choice——"

"For example," interrupted Mr. Medlicott warily, "you would raise no opposition to her marriage with a man—say twice her age. A man who had sown his wild oats and repented over his harvest; a man unexceptionable in all respects save that he was weighted by a past."

"Are you thinking of such an one in connection with my daughter?" asked Dr. Rolt sharply.

"Yes—no;—an idea flashed through my mind, that was all, and though the question may have no particular bearing upon Ginevra's future, I wondered what your views might be."

"If Ginevra loved such a man, I would bid her marry as her heart dictated," said Dr. Rolt impressively. "She might suffer regret, but not the hell of longing for a joy she could

not know without shame. But the love should be proved. For this reason, in the event of her engaging herself to marry, I insist upon a year's probation, with full option of withdrawal after the engagement has been formed."

"Is that all?" said Mr. Medlicott relieved. He had expected from the preamble that some stringent and difficult condition would be attached to his guardianship. "No honourable man would object to so reasonable a proviso."

Dr. Rolt rose, paced the room for a moment or two, then returned to his seat. "There is another matter," he began, with visible reluctance, "which, before we enter into strict business, has to be settled. I have left in my will a life income of £300, to be paid annually to a lady"—there was a slight pause—"a lady in whom I was once interested. I should like to feel certain that I can rely upon your efforts to carry out the bequest."

Mr. Medlicott nodded blandly. "I will do my utmost. Let me know the circumstances. Is the lady young or old, maid, wife, or widow? and what is her place of abode?"

"That I cannot tell you. If I could there would be no need to ask your help."

"Oh! it is a case for a private inquiry office!"

"Her age if she is alive must now be about six-and-thirty. Her maiden name was Clémence Desolles; her married one Fosgate. It is uncertain under which she will no be known; probably the former."

Mr. Medlicott produced his pocket-book and began to write.

"That is not necessary," said Dr. Rolt "All particulars which can facilitate the search are already noted; and after my death will be placed in your hands, with a miniature which may assist in identifying the lady. This I must, however, tell you now. Clémence Fosgate was by birth a Frenchwoman, and married when very young an Englishman considerably older than herself, who held a civil appointment in India."

"Who is still living?' interjected Mr. Medlicott.

Dr. Rolt shook his head. "Five years after her marriage Mrs. Fosgate was compelled by sudden ill health to leave India. She sailed for England alone with the understanding that her husband and child would shortly follow her. Four months later Fosgate received from her a wild incoherent letter dated from Paris, stating that she no longer loved him,

that she had quitted him for ever, and was then living under the protection of a man who had won her heart. At that time, some twelve years ago, her history, as far as I know it, closes."

"And the name of her seducer?" asked Mr. Medlicott with interest.

"It was not mentioned in the letter; and Fosgate made no effort to discover it."

"He did not then follow the guilty pair to Europe, and avenge his wrongs in a duel or put in a plea for divorce?"

"No; he burned his wife's letter, and destroyed all associations which connected her with his past, so that she became to him as completely dead as though he had never known her."

Mr. Medlicott sat for a few moments in deep thought. "What is it that you wish me to do?"

"To find this woman, if she is alive, and to provide for the annual payment of the income which I have left her, and which may preserve her from sinking to a lower deep of shame. There are no conditions attached to the trust except that of secrecy. For that reason I confide it to you. Will you undertake it?"

"It does not seem to involve any troublesome responsibility; and even if such were the case, I would not shrink from a duty imposed upon me by a friend," said Mr. Medlicott with an expansive patronage at which Dr. Rolt involuntarily smiled. The squatter winced, but in an impulse of sincerity stretched out his smooth large hand and grasped that of his companion. "Rely upon me, both as regards zeal and secrecy. You will furnish me with all possible data, and I have no doubt that the lady will be found within a week of the commencement of our search."

"Thank you. Yes, I place the utmost confidence in your kind intentions towards me, though I am treating you with only half frankness. But it is impossible for me to be unreserved. As you perhaps conjecture, there have been circumstances in my life which connect it with that of Clémence Fosgate; and though you may during your inquiry learn something of the past history of us both, I must enjoin upon you absolute silence concerning it. Whatever natural curiosity you may feel, I must beg you not to indulge by seeking revelations which are not necessary to the discharge of your

trust. I have already assured you that in my past there is no guilt with which I can reproach myself. Above all things, let Ginevra be shielded from remotest contact with Clémence Fosgate. She *must* be kept in ignorance both of the fact of the legacy, and of this woman's existence. I appeal to you as a man of honour to guard my secret faithfully. Do you promise?"

"I give you my word: you may depend upon it. In all ways I will respect your wishes."

"I thank you, Medlicott. You will find that I am not unmindful of all I owe to you. And now we have done with this subject, and it need not be again referred to. The afternoon is waning; we will proceed at once to business. Better settle everything now. I may never see you at Birrali. You would think me the last person to be moved by any superstitious fancies; but I am utterly unable to shake off a presentiment of coming doom. This surprises me, for I have long felt that death is better than life. I suppose that it is a sign of the end."

CHAPTER VII.

RESPONSIVE HEARTS.

GINEVRA returned to the boarding-house with glowing face and quickened pulsation. A thousand girlish confidences on the subject of Colonel Gilmore, the strange lady and her child, the unwonted sights and sounds of the day, were bubbling in her mind. Her being was in a tumult in which sweet, tender thoughts and exquisite yearnings mingled with mysterious joy, and equally mysterious dread. She seemed moving, breathing, living to the accompaniment of some holy melody, by which her soul was lifted towards a heaven of which it had never dreamed—and the melody blended with Gilmore's words, with the theme of love, though she knew not that it was love. Yet she was conscious of a sense of strangeness, and loneliness, and vague fear; she would fain have crept timidly to her father's feet, and leaning her head against his arm, have thus without words assured herself of his sympathy;

and protection. But with her entrance and the sight of his thoughtful, harassed face, this impulse passed, and in its stead there crept over her a feeling of chill and isolation; and she stood silent and pale—upon the threshold.

"Ginevra . . . Jenny."

Never since her early childhood had he called her by the latter pet name. Tears filled her eyes, so new and sweet to her was this tenderness. She ran to his side, and fondled his hand, hardly daring to speak, but agitated by dim foreboding of evil. Then, though careful not to awaken in her mind any suspicion of his real danger, he conveyed to her in gentle language that the doctor had pronounced his state of health uncertain, and told her, that although there was no need for present anxiety, he had thought it wise to provide for her future, and had chosen Andrew Medlicott to be her guardian.

Ginevra listened dumbly, only lifting her great eyes to her father's face in pathetic entreaty. Her childhood and all that had made its sweetness and its bitterness seemed slipping from her rapidly. She laid her head upon his knee and burst into uncontrollable sobbing.

He tried in awkward fashion to soothe her agitation.

"Ginevra! Why do you cry? Nothing has happened. There is no occasion for you to grieve."

"Daddy," cried Genevra brokenly; "I don't know why I am sad. Something has come over me. I don't feel as I used. I ought not to have left you alone to-day. I have left you alone . . . And you don't seem to care . . . and I—I mind, oh, I mind. Daddy, why don't you love me as I love you?"

"Hush!" exclaimed the old man, with a quick, nervous utterance that betrayed his dread of showing emotion. "What is there to mind? I am not going to leave you yet; and if I were, tears and lamentations will neither retard nor hasten the day of death. We are going back to Birrali to-morrow. I have much to think of—work to do—investigations to carry on. Besides these considerations shadowy fears should have no place. . . . And the doctor has said that any excitement is harmful to me. There is a motive for practising self-control. As for you, why, child, your life is before you. I must in reality fill but a small portion of it. You make me of too great importance. Perhaps I have not repaid your affection as fully as it deserved. In years to

come, if you are ever inclined to reproach me, think that I should have been more demonstrative if I had not feared disappointment. It has been my effort to cultivate hardness. I did not wish to bleed, as men bleed who worship idols."

"And women. Do they never suffer?" asked Genevra, with involuntary bitterness.

"Not in the same fashion. Love and tears are women's emotional luxuries. It is the custom of your sex, Ginevra, to attack life with a sort of hysterical fervour which prevents you from viewing it at a rational distance. You must needs place objects always, as it were, under a magnifying-glass; and so you lose sight of fixed principles and exaggerate detail. If you had been a boy," he added with some querulousness, "you would not have questioned my affection for you. Is there any need for me to assure you that I study your welfare? Am I ever displeased with you? Can you doubt that you are a source of satisfaction to me."

Ginevra raised herself, and looked at him questioningly. But his eyes remained bent upon the floor. "I should like to feel certain of it sometimes, father," she answered sadly.

There was a moment's embarrassed silence. Then the ringing of the dressing bell startled both, and gave him a pretext for changing the conversation. He insisted upon her joining the *table d'hôte*, upon the plea that he had some writing to do, and wished to be alone. At ten o'clock, he said, she might return and read to him. So urgent was he, even infusing into his manner some semblance of gaiety and interest, that her vague uneasiness vanished, and she departed to put on her white gown, and to fasten a bunch of roses at her throat, in the buoyant spirits of a young girl to whom even a *table d'hôte* is a novelty.

But fortune separated her by the width of the board from Colonel Gilmore. When the meal was over, and Mrs. Medlicott had made a stately move towards the drawing-room, she with shy womanly instinct was following in her wake; but Gilmore, lingering beside the open French window detained her with a whispered entreaty—

"Will you not take a stroll in the garden? I have no doubt that some of the others will find their way out presently. The drawing-room is too hot to be endured on such an evening as this when mosquito-whisks are a necessity of existence, and a punkah a luxury to be sighed for in vain."

She laughed shyly, and complied. Presently they were pacing the gravel-walk together, her skirts brushing the tiger-lilies and drooping roses, while the stars came out in the blue overhead, and short twilight deepened into odorous night. Ginevra's mood of gaiety seemed to have returned. She was again the tricksy elf of the night before with dancing eyes, and lithe, bending figure.

Within, Andrew Medlicott and Mrs. Bonamorris sat absorbed in a game of cribbage. Mrs. Medlicott wrought industriously in crewels while she chatted condescendingly to a young northern bride who had reinforced the party; and the Government clerk with his head sentimentally inclined to one side strummed the piano with more vigour than sweetness, and chanted a mild falsetto:

"Is this a dream? Then waking would be pain."

(In passionate and unbridled crescendo.)

"Oh! do not wake me. Let me dream again."

"Pretty Poll!" murmured Ginevra in the garden, giving a mischievous twist to her long throat, and as the ditty ended, breaking into a subdued imitation of the jackass' laughing chorus.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Bonamorris in audible tones. "Fifteen two, fifteen four, and I mark the knave. This is the first time I have ever heard a laughing jackass in the garden. They are after my Chinese peaches."

The singer rose, and after directing a searching glance round the drawing-room was preparing to make his exit through the French window.

"Let us fly," murmured Gilmore; "unerring instinct assures me that *you* are the object of his anxious gaze. Not content with having monopolized you during dinner, he would chain himself to your side for the remainder of the evening. I gave him fair play then; but now I claim my rights."

"Do you not know that he is coming to the Birrali races?" said Ginevra, speaking hurriedly as they walked swiftly under the shelter of a row of oleanders and pomegranates. "I heard him ask Mr. Medlicott for an invitation. The Colonial Treasurer is his brother-in law, so that leave is always granted him when he applies for it. He took great pains to impress upon me the importance of this fact. And I am so fortunate

as to have inspired him with interest. He has been bewailing the dull life which he fancies that I lead. And only think, Colonel Gilmore, he has announced his intention of asking his sister to invite me to stay with her during the winter. Fancy being the guest of the Colonial Treasurer!"

"Insufferable puppy!" ejaculated Gilmore.

"While you were talking to Mr. Medlicott, he favoured me with his views upon matrimony," continued Ginevra with mock gravity. "Australia expects every man to do his duty, and Mr. Peverton considers it the duty of every man to marry before he is stricken in years; though at the same time he does not at present regret being a bachelor. What do you think about it, Colonel Gilmore?"

They had walked some way down the narrow path, and now, quite hidden by a grove of rustling bananas, paused before a low fence which separated the upper garden from a little field of pineapples extending to the river.

"About Mr. Peverton's opinions, or marriage in general?"

"I am not in the least interested in Mr. Peverton's opinions," replied Genevra, looking away. "I don't think that I meant what I was saying."

Gilmore leaned over the rails, and turning his head let his eyes rest deliberately upon his companion's face.

"Does it appear strange to you that I have never married?" he asked. "I must seem almost an old man in the eyes of a young girl like you."

"How old are you?" asked Ginevra simply.

"Forty-three."

"And I am eighteen."

"Twenty-five years difference between us," said Gilmore sadly. "Ah me! But you have not answered my question."

"I do not think it strange," replied Ginevra; and added in a dreamy tone: "If what you said yesterday is true, real love can only be felt once. Why should it be taken for granted that in order to love, one must be young?"

"Oh why indeed? One can only love once—yes, that is the true creed; and if so, the pale lights which shine upon our youth are only wandering fires. I have followed many—ah, many! You would shrink from me—perhaps hate me, if you could comprehend the sort of life that I have led. . . ." He paused and turned away his eyes. She stretched out her hand to him in a guileless impulse of sympathy. But he

did not see the movement; and she drew her arm back again.

He continued: "I don't want you to think better of me than I deserve. It is very much the custom with us to attribute our wrong-doings and shortcomings to some early disappointment; but I honestly believe no greater calamity can befall a man than one which at the outset of his career destroys his faith in the truth and purity of women. Such a misfortune happened to me."

Ginevra drew a deep breath as of pain. "Oh, I am sorry," she murmured, in her sweet, child-like way.

"Don't be sorry," said Gilmore huskily. "I *want* you to think badly of me,—but not too badly. Think of me as one who *can* reverence goodness and purity; who, if an angel deigned to stretch forth her hand to him, would fain fall at her feet and worship. . . . When I was twenty-three," he continued more calmly, "I engaged myself to marry a young girl for whom I felt all the foolish, mad attachment of which a hot-blooded youth is capable.. I do not know if it would have lasted. I think probably not. There were, however, money difficulties in the way; and a year's separation was insisted upon by our respective parents. I was sent abroad; we were not allowed to correspond, and were kept as far as possible in ignorance of each other's thoughts and movements. At the expiration of my term of probation I returned to claim my bride. The first news which I heard upon my arrival in England was that she had been married a week before. . . . Such a shock as that changes a man's nature. It was the turning-point for evil in my life. The few years which followed seem to me now like a fevered nightmare. I shudder when I think of them—I *will* not think of them in your presence. . . . I don't believe," he went on passionately, "that familiarity with what is evil and degrading must necessarily debase a man's nature and quench for ever all yearnings after what is good. It might be—nay, it *is*—that contact with a beautiful mind, which mirrors only what is lovely, and to which every sight and sound is the inspiration of some pure and happy thought—would awaken dormant impulses and create anew holy aspirations towards noble living, and honour, and chivalrous loyalty, thus becoming the means of redemption to a soul that might otherwise have sunk into blackness. Tell me—in accomplishing such an end,

would a woman feel that her life and her love had been ill-bestowed?"

Ginevra's eyes shone bright as the stars towards which they were raised.

"To accomplish such an end, a woman might suffer martyrdom and count it no sacrifice," she answered with soft enthusiasm.

Gilmore stretched out his hand and clasped hers. He felt her fingers tremble within his own, but neither spoke. A strange awe crept over him; he released her from his touch. Then upon the still air was borne the tinkling of a bell and the sound of rushing water. A great steamer glided by.

The incident seemed to recall Gilmore to the outer world. He shook himself together, as it were, and pointing to the vanishing lights, said in his ordinary tone—"But for last night's game at destiny I should have been now on the sea speeding northwards. Ah, Miss Rolt, was I wise after all to challenge fate so rashly? The Birrali races will soon have come and gone, and the day of reckoning must be faced."

They lingered on, the moon rose, and the garden seemed full of moving shadows as the broad banana leaves in the grove swayed gently to and fro. The perfumes grew stronger, and a breeze sweeping up from the river fanned Ginevra's cheeks wooingly.

Suddenly she paused in her rippling talk, held her breath, and with a gesture of mock alarm, retreated behind a vine-covered trellis near which they stood. There sounded a step upon the gravel, a burst of falsetto melody.

"*Take back the heart that thou ga—avest,*" and a tentative call of "Miss Rolt!"

"Pretty Poll again," whispered Ginevra. "Pray be silent."

Gilmore stealthily joined her; and the two hid guiltily, so close, that their arms, almost their faces, touched. After a few moments, steps and murmur died away, and a single stroke booming across the river like a knell startled Ginevra in her covert.

"It is the great clock on the north side," said Gilmore.

"What a long time we have been here!" she exclaimed in alarm. "That must be half-past nine. Please let me look at your watch."

Gilmore held the dial towards her, and they examined it by moonlight and found her conjecture to be correct. "Why

should you mind how the time goes?" he asked. "One has not so many happy hours in life as to make it worth while to chronicle them. We were later than this yesterday evening."

"I said that I would read to Daddy at ten," said Ginevra.

"Then we have still half-an-hour," answered Gilmore, triumphantly closing the watch.

"Not even a quarter of an hour—not ten minutes," said Ginevra with energy. "I must go in at once. He starts at nine o'clock to-morrow morning; and I have still to pack up all the fine clothes which Mrs. Medlicott bought me to-day."

"Then after to-night I shall see you no more till we meet at Birrali. I prefer bidding you farewell in this moonlit garden to saying it to-morrow in the sight and hearing of all Mrs. Bonamorris's boarders. Ginevra—I like your quaint foreign name; it is in harmony with your face, and with the murmurings and perfumes of this balmy un-English evening—will you be kind to me at Birrali?"

She did not answer, but there was a sweet consciousness in her downcast look.

"And you will remember our compact?" continued Gilmore earnestly. "You will look upon me as your friend—your close friend. Good night, sweet child,—and good-bye. May you have happy dreams! May all your thoughts be joyous till we meet again!"

* * * * * *

Upon the following morning a covered buggy drew up at Mrs. Bonamorris's door. Dr. and Miss Rolt's luggage—the latter considerably augmented since yesterday—was strapped on behind; and presently the old man and his daughter stepped forth into the road.

All the boarders, with notably the exception of Colonel Gilmore, had, after the kindly Australian fashion, assembled in the verandah to bid the travellers good speed. Mr. Medlicott warmly clasped the doctor's hand and whispered a few words which were intended to be reassuring. Mrs. Medlicott kissed Ginevra; and the landlady, impelled thereto by the girl's gracefully tendered thanks, which she felt with self-reproach were not deserved, followed the greater lady's example. Mr. Peverton made his sentimental adieux; even the Yahoo rushed forward with outstretched horny fingers. Dr. Rolt raised his hat in a comprehensive salute. Ginevra nodded and waved her hand, and the buggy drove away.

Both father and daughter had been too much preoccupied to notice a woman leading a little child, who pacing slowly under the acacia hedge opposite, had watched the leave-takings.

Her eyes fastened themselves upon Dr. Rolt as he took his place in the vehicle. Pausing suddenly in her walk and craning her head forward, she uttered a sharp ejaculation, then leaned back, pale and with palpitating bosom, against a projecting gate-post, remaining thus a prey to some deep agitation, till mid a cloud of dust the carriage disappeared.

She lingered for several minutes after the departure, her gaze fixed vacantly upon the boarding-house. Presently all its inmates re-entered the sitting-room, save the landlady, who remained in the verandah, and busied herself in watering a stand of ferns.

The little girl opposite, who had been gathering and shredding the golden acacia blossoms, cried out to attract her mother's attention: "Mammy, mammy, did you see? That was the other Ginevra—the pretty lady at the ferry."

"*The other Ginevra.* Oh, my God!" murmured the woman. She pulled the child by the arm almost roughly, walked across the road, opened the wicket-gate and boldly accosted Mrs. Bonamorris.

"Will you have the goodness to tell me where Dr. Fosgate lives—the gentleman who has just gone away from your house?"

Mrs. Bonamorris suspended her occupation and critically eyed the questioner.

There is a certain freemasonry among women which makes them good moral detectives of their frailer sisters. To their quick insight, the twist of a curl, the set of a feather, an apparently innocent shade upon the lower eyelid, may be damnatory evidence of culpability. In the present case, the examination seemed not entirely satisfactory. Mrs. Bonamorris turned away doubtfully and replied in sharp tones—

"You are under some mistake. The name of that gentleman who has just driven away is Rolt, not Fosgate."

The stranger started. "Rolt. True. I might have remembered. It was a confusion of ideas. And the girl beside him is his daughter?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bonamorris curtly.

"I must beg you to give me Dr. Rolt's address," continued

the stranger persuasively, and speaking with a calmness which might have suggested intense self-restraint. "It is necessary that I should communicate with him as soon as possible. Had I been a little earlier I should not have needed to trouble you. He does not live in Leichardt's Town?"

"Since you wish to know, his address is 'The Peak, Birrali.' He has a selection on Mr. Medlicott's station, near the Yerangil Diggings, and fifty miles beyond Kooya."

Mrs. Bonamorris put down her watering-pot with a decisive jerk, and nodded dismissal to her interlocutor. The stranger murmured her thanks, and taking her little girl's hand turned up the road which led towards the cliffs.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MEDLICOTT ENTERTAINS AT BIRRALI.

The district of the Ubi, besides being famous for the excellence of its breed of merinos, was noted in Leichardt's Land as the scene of certain festivities which took place annually at a given station, each proprietor acting as host in turn; when three days and nights were given up by all within the borders —blacks and shepherds included—to racing, dancing, corroboreeing, and other amusements.

The racing was harmless enough. Only grass-fed horses were allowed to compete for the prizes, and these steeds were usually bestridden by their respective owners. High and low, magnates and vassals, met on a footing of common interest. If a great squatter carried off the Birrali Cup, the stock-boy and the postman had an equally good chance of winning the stake. The presence of ladies ensured orderliness of behaviour; there was little drinking, no betting, and representatives of the professional and black-leg elements were vigorously excluded from participation in the sport.

The simplicity with which these entertainments were carried out contributed greatly to their popularity. No squatter was too poor to take his turn at the races. If his house was small, there was always a woolshed, and tents could be easily erected.

If beds were lacking, the store held an unlimited supply of blankets, and blady grass could be readily cut on the flats. If the commissariat was low, and champagne not forthcoming, salt beef and damper could be had for the asking; and there was always rum, or at worst tea. If, when money was no object, drays were delayed, or tinned delicacies at a premium, the herd, the poultry-yard, the wild-duck preserves, and the garden, could at least be relied upon.

Mrs. Medlicott was sometimes heard to sigh ostentatiously, and to regret that social intercourse in Woodfordshire could not be conducted upon the same primitive basis.

Invitations on these occasions were, indeed, hardly necessary. Upon the day appointed, from near and from far, people rode and drove to the meeting-place. Squatters with their wives and daughters; stray guests from the various townships; superintendents, new chums, representatives of the better class of Free Selectors, all mustered; the gentlemen by scores, the ladies by tens, before their host's slip-rails. No elaborate stabling accommodation was required. The brute kind were turned out to grass, and the buggies housed under tarpaulins; ladies were received into the head-station dwelling-house, which, under such circumstances, became of elastic dimensions; a row of tents furnished forth sleeping-quarters for the gentlemen. In the spring, which was the season at which these meetings usually took place, the days are warm, the nights mild, and fine weather may almost with certainty be counted upon.

This year the lot had fallen upon Andrew Medlicott's station of Birrali. It was talked of as one of the most luxurious abodes in the districts; the reputed wealth of its owner and his European experiences afforded scope for expectation. Great doings were prophesied; now it was known that the presence of the squatter and his wife would add lustre to the festivity.

Mr. Medlicott enjoyed nothing so heartily as a triumphal progress through the country to which he owed his prosperity. Upon these occasions his chest expanded more freely, his manners became blander, and his after-dinner speeches more self-gratulatory, than even when he dilated upon his achievements and distinctions at the Anglo-Australian banquets in which his soul delighted.

Upon a bright November day, about a week after the Rolts'

departure from Mrs. Bonamorris's, Birrali head-station was in a flutter of expectancy and preparation.

It was a large rambling place, surrounded by extensive yards and out-buildings, with a dwelling-house of which part was of slabs and bark, part of sawn wood and shingles, and part, as the demands of civilization increased, of stone and cedar, built in detached wings connected by wide verandahs and creeper-grown trellises, and which, though now committed to the care of a manager, had been furnished with reference to the frequent visits of its master, in a more refined and artistic style than usually prevails in the Bush.

Like many Australian head-stations, that of Birrali stood on the ascent of a hill. Behind it, rose a range of jagged mountains approached by undulating timbered downs. A green line cutting the flat country to the right, marked the course of the river; and a large garden and vineyard sloped down from the house to the plain. This plain was the glory of Birrali. Clothed with waving grass; dotted at intervals with clumps of she-oak, eucalyptus, and cedar trees; and intersected by lagoons and running gullies, it extended unbroken by a single rise as far as the eastern horizon. Here and there a flock of sheep, a herd of cattle, or group of horses, lent animation to the scene, and stood out, light and dark patches against the grey-green; and near at hand, beyond the lake, or, more familiarly, the "one-eyed waterhole" which lay at the foot of the vineyard, a circle of gay flags indicated the boundary of the race-course.

The head-station—an inhabited oasis mid solitude as unbroken as that of a desert—looked a picturesque abode against its background of grey and granite rock, and the steely shadows of the eucalyptus forest. In the mountainous country beyond the range was situated the home of Dr. Rolt and his daughter. Here the land was almost valueless, and the dwellers on it so few that the near vicinity of a town would hardly have been suspected. In other parts the district was fertile and populous, and offered advantages to the enterprising settler. There was a railway terminus within fifty miles of Birrali, and a coach ran between the station and the mining township of Yerangil not far from the Doctor's selection; but the diggings had only been lately discovered, and the railroad and coach were innovations which had been made since the philosopher had settled himself among the mountains.

It was four o'clock, and Mr. Medlicott was complacently surveying his final preparations. He had arrived from Leichardt's Town two days before, accompanied by his wife and Colonel Gilmore, and immediately followed by a string of drays laden with all the appliances and luxuries procurable. He was determined that this particular race meeting should be a landmark in the history of Birrali. A large marquee had been erected in the garden, its dingy tarpaulin covering, which had protected many a load of wool bales, decorated with flags, green boughs, and scrub creepers; and the curtains at its entrance festooned back, and admitting whiffs from the jessamine and datura flowers that bloomed by the verandah; while within, long tables already spread, gave token that this was to be the scene of feasting. A fresh-laid gravel-walk communicated with the old wool-shed, called so in contra-distinction to the new edifice which, with all its modern improvements and spacious stalls, was built nearer the washing-pools, and here planers and scourers were setting all in order for dancing. The professional piano-tuner, who on his piebald nag, and with an infinitesimal valise, wandered from one station to another, and invariably appeared on gala occasions, had "turned up" that morning, and had been promptly engaged by Mr. Medlicott as leader of the band, which consisted otherwise of a fiddle, a flute, a cornet, and a Jew's-harp played by two accomplished fencers, and a pair of musicians from Yerangil. Every room in the house had been put under requisition for the accommodation of the ladies, and part of the verandah had been partitioned off to provide further sleeping-apartments. The bachelors' quarters; the overseer's cottage; the men's huts; even the cart-sheds and the corn-stores, had been swept and garnished for the use of the gentlemen; and still space was lacking, as was testified by the long row of tents pitched on the bank of the lagoon.

Each male guest had, as a matter of provision, brought his own blankets, and as the afternoon waned and a great crowd streamed across the plain and through the paddock slip-rails, a vast pile of bed-gear accumulated round the stockyard fence, mid rows of saddles, coils of bridles, stock-whips, and strings of pint-pots—blankets encircled by straps, or spread out in all their glory, blue, red-striped—not unfrequently enfolding the jockey-coats and evening costumes of their owners.

The arrivals formed a motley assemblage. Some came in stylish buggies, drawn by four spirited horses; some in clumsy-looking American waggons; some with pairs, some with tandems—in "Coach, carriage, cart, wheel-barrow,"—as "rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief." Many rode. Ladies in habits of grey linen, and brown holland, evidently of home manufacture; some few in the regulation hat and in tailor-made garments; townsmen—among whom Mr. Peverton, the Government clerk, was conspicuous—carrying smart valises and wearing unexceptionable tops; bushmen, lean and lanky, square and compact, sitting firm in their saddles with spurred heels and coiled stock-whips; bushmen of all grades and kinds, from the soldier-like old squatter, escorting his pretty daughters from a neighbouring station, with birth and breeding written on every line of his fine face and stalwart figure; and the young colonial buck with his sandal-wood whip-handle and natty rosettes at his horses' ears, to the uncouth Selector, whose coat had evidently been donned at the slip-rails, and who shrank in visible terror from approaching his hostess.

Behind, came the long string of racers and pack-horses led by black boys, who in their bright flannel shirts and Jim Crow hats, their bead-like eyes and white teeth glistening as they laughed and joked in their own vernacular, constituted not the least picturesque element in the procession.

Mr. Medlicott had a welcoming word for each and all of the incongruous party.

"Hullo, Fitzpatrick! So you have managed to dispose of the Marsupial Bill and to work a parliamentary recess for the Australian Derby, eh? Welcome, my noble senator. . . . This way, Miss Rompingford. Don't be uneasy about the swag. Trust me to take care that the ball-dresses ain't sat upon. Haven't I travelled with three daughters, imperials, band-boxes, and all that sort of thing?—an old hand with ladies. Gordon, how do you do?" shaking hands with the soldier-like squatter before mentioned. "Glad to see you over the border. Been bailed up by any bushrangers lately? If I don't mistake my man, I see Perseverance Dick grinning at you from behind the black boys. Never mind, Dick. This isn't Tom Tiddler's ground. Racing is our business now, and we won't ask where you got your horse."

"All square, Capt'n," shouted a voice from the crowd;

"all above-board this time. I've not been up before you for twelve months, Capt'n. But I'll tell you how it is—it's just this. When I sees a good 'oss—mind you, a *real* good 'oss—I'm blowed if I can keep my hands off shaking of him—when I gets the chance."

"Then don't you go 'shaking of' these paddocks, Dick," called out the Captain, good-humouredly. "The magistrates on this side of the border won't let you off as easily as I do."

"I said, when I gets a chance, Capt'n," said Perseverance Dick, loftily retiring into the background.

The stream of greeting continued unbroken by the interruption, and with happy impartiality Mr. Medlicott turned his attention to a shy, red-faced bushman who was trying not to see his host's outstretched hand. "Never mind your coat, Swainson. God bless me, my dear fellow, there was a time when I shouldn't have known myself without my shirt-sleeves tucked up. Go and get some grog in the Bachelors' Quarters, and face the missus afterwards. . . . Why, Taddy Walsh, and how the deuce do the mails turn up here two days before their time? Ah, I know your dodges. Take care; here is the Minister for Lands; and if he hadn't a weakness for racing himself, he would report you for hard riding to the Postmaster-General. . . . Tea in the drawing-room, ladies. Colonel Gilmore will show you the way. . . . Hi, Pint-pot! Budgery yarraman that. What for you woollah me that ba'al yarraman belong to black fellow? You go sit down along camp, and ba'al you make black fellow drunk."

"Now, gentlemen, I don't need to tell you that this is Australia, not England. There's grass and water in the paddock for the horses. Good food and amusement provided for the men. Each for himself, and God for all—no favouritism, and respect shown only to the ladies and elders. There are bedrooms and beds as far as they will go; and for the rest blankets on the ground, grass tree-tops on the ridge, and the lagoon handy for a swim. If you want spring mattresses, and hot and cold water laid on, you'll have to come and see me at Champneys, for there is none of that sort of thing here."

When the sun was setting, and the mountains stood forth purple and jagged against a golden sky; when the glorious afterglow and tender dusk had mellowed and softened all that was wild and inharmonious in the scene, leaving only

the poetic and beautiful, a young girl, attended by an elderly serving-man leading a packhorse, rode down from across the ranges, and drew rein at the verandah.

And Gilmore stood, timid as a bashful youth, in the presence of his heart's queen, waiting till her lovely eyes should be turned upon him in greeting. Oh, magic of love, what can make a God-forgotten world seem bright as Adam's Paradise, and kindle anew in a worn-out soul the pure fibres of hope and reverence and loyal worship!

It seemed to him, and yet the thought was too daring, that Ginevra's mien expressed, too, something of this mysterious transition. Blending with its innocent gaiety there was an air of pensive reserve—of awe—almost spirituality, which told of a heart thrilled by new and ineffable sympathies. A keen sense of exultation seized him, but it was succeeded by an overpowering humility and feeling of deep unworthiness. He turned way. It was as though a voice had whispered to him: "What right have you to enter this sacred temple, or to kneel before this shrine?"

"Missus, I believe it will be a case between Gilmore and Ginevra," announced Mr. Medlicott in the intervals of sluicing his face as he dressed for dinner. "They will settle matters before the races are over; and my responsibilities will be at an end as soon as they have begun."

Mr. Medlicott had confided Dr. Rolt's intentions to his wife, and the prospect found favour in her sight. Something in the young girl—she hardly knew where the charm lay—had pierced the crust of worldliness in her nature, and touched a tender spot long hidden from the outer circle of her acquaintances.

"I should not like to see Ginevra married to Colonel Gilmore. She is too young, and he has led a bad life."

"You are like the rest of your sex," said Mr. Medlicott, with good-humoured banter. "Once you know anything bad of a man, you never give him credit for good intentions. Gilmore is a reformed character. He has repented his former sins in sackcloth and ashes. To what else could you liken exile on the Barcoo? I think he has the most sincere hankering after the domestic virtues. He will make a model husband; and I can see already that Ginevra is ready to worship him."

"She is so young," repeated Mrs. Medlicott; "and she

know nothing of the world. One does not pity women who have never had any illusions; but how terrible if she were to marry Colonel Gilmore imagining herself his first love, and were then to discover that his name had once been a by-word for vice! Yes, I know it, Andrew. Do you think I have not heard things said of him in Woodfordshire?—that he had lived for years with another man's wife, and had deserted her—and that he had children whom he could not own."

"Your knowledge of the world, my dear, ought to tell you that he is not entirely singular in that respect," said Mr. Medlicott, with the coarse cynicism upon which he rather prided himself. "But you are wrong in saying that Gilmore deserted that woman. Will Cassilis managed the affair, and though *he* thought that his cousin ought at all costs to have brought her out here, he told me that Gilmore provided for her as far as he was able."

* * * * * *

The tent, lighted by pendent lanterns and green-wreathed chandeliers, echoed an hour later with the sound of conversation and laughter. The long table was piled with loins, haunches, gigantic rounds, plump bipeds, solid viands of all descriptions, lighter dainties in the shape of frothy creams and quivering jellies, and baskets of golden bananas and luscious peaches, overshadowed by tall vases bearing sprays of the lilac thumbergia, feathery deutzia, banksia roses, and maiden-hair fern.

More than a hundred guests were assembled. Andrew Medlicott, florid and beaming, presided at the board. He had said his unctuous grace, and had delivered his preprandial exordium. His genial soul lent itself kindly to a festive occasion such as this. He liked to see his friends gathered in enjoyment round his table: he liked to feel himself king of their pleasures: and perhaps he experienced greater satisfaction in swaggering here among his old associates, than he could have done in the loftier regions to which he contrived to climb when in England.

The Birrali Cup, to be run for on the morrow, was placed upon a flower-twined pedestal in the centre of the table. It was customary, at the conclusion of the repast, to fill it with champagne and to pass it round as a loving cup, so that each guest might sip of its contents. Mrs. Medlicott had displayed considerable tact in the arrangement of her company. Ladies

faultlessly attired, with shining shoulders and trim heads, and gentlemen in immaculate shirt-fronts, flanked their host and hostess at each end, while towards the centre of the table white muslin Garibaldis, ancient black silks modernized by means of gay ribbons and cheap lace, grey tweed suits and homely duck garments, congregated together, as if with a view to equalizing their unsuitability. Here talk, racing and bucolic, predominated. Ginevra Rolt and Colonel Gilmore sat side by side. Many eyes were turned upon the young girl; for it was her first appearance in public. The seclusion in which she had been brought up, her father's reputation for talent and eccentricity, and the rumours which had already begun to circulate concerning her probable wealth, lent a double interest to her beauty. Her shy consciousness of the attention she excited manifested itself in the deepened flush upon her cheeks, and the brilliant light in her eyes. And now Gilmore saw the exquisite throat in its bareness, milk-white with its vanishing dimples and baby-like depressions, rising above a quaintly fashioned dress of black which had been made under Mrs. Medlicott's direction. How fair she was!—how pure, in her girl womanliness!

She, glancing upward, caught his eyes fixed upon her face, and smiled in a timid interrogative manner.

"Are you still making mental observations upon life?" he asked, laughing a little unsteadily; "and at this moment does it meet your pleasurable anticipations?"

"I am very happy," answered Ginevra simply. "I do not quite know why I am so happy," she added, with that tendency to introspection which was peculiar in one so young. "As I rode along to-day over the hills, the world seemed so bright, the flowers and the birds and the trees were so beautiful, and the wind stirring the leaves seemed to carry me a message, bidding me rejoice."

She spoke so naturally, though her tone was thoughtful and her eyes dream-lustred, that there appeared nothing strained in the quaintness of her phraseology.

"It has been a lovely day," he said, trying to speak in a commonplace manner, though his voice shook; "and your nature is sensitive to outward influences."

"Do you think it a misfortune to be sensitive?" she asked.

"Oh no," he exclaimed earnestly. "I think it is beautiful. If I could order your life as I wished, there should be no dis-

cords in it. But, come; you have eaten scarcely anything; drink some of your champagne. Remember that we are to dance after dinner: and remember our engagement also. You promised that I should teach you to waltz."

"I must not let you imagine that I have *never* danced a step," said Ginevra, laughing in her girlish way. "I will tell you a secret. When I got home after our visit to Leichardt's Town, I asked Nancy Gryce if she knew how to dance. 'Why, miss,' she answered" (Ginevra mimicked the peculiarities of Mrs. Gryce's midlandshire accent), "'I don't deny as I wur fond o' futten it at the feasts;' so David came in, and we made him play the Jew's harp, while we whirled round the kitchen floor."

"It sounds an inspiriting performance," said Gilmore. "Tell me," he added, glancing down the table, "do you know these people? Have any of them ever been to visit you?"

Ginevra laughed as though the question evoked amusing reminiscences. "Yes; several of the gentlemen have been once to the Selection; but none of them ever repeated the call. Nancy Gryce frightened them away. Do you see that red-whiskered man sitting next the lady in a habit?"

"I have found him. And, by the way, is it the custom in these parts to ride, walk, and dine in the same outer vestment?"

"Thereby hangs a tale of misfortune. The pack-horse which was carrying that lady's clothes, bolted on the way over, with a mob of wild horses. The black boys are out tracking him; but in all probability Miss Macalpine's finery will lie strewn under the gum trees till a stockman finds and brings back the shreds. She is very unhappy about it, but her spirits have risen since I promised to lend her one of my new dresses for the ball to-morrow night. That red-whiskered man has a Selection not far from us, and Mr. Medlicott tells me that he is on the debateable ground between the drawing-room and the Bachelors' Quarters. He had a fancy for making our acquaintance, and rode over one day to the Peak. This is how Nancy greeted him when she saw him hanging up his horse: 'Are ye a gentleman?' 'Well,' he answered, 'I suppose I am as God made me.' 'Because if ye're a gentleman,' said Nancy, 'ye'll go to the parlour, and if ye're not, ye'll go below among the men. Are ye rich, or are ye poor? Because if ye're rich I'll take ye into the

dining-room; but if ye're poor ye must just go beyond to the huts.' Mr. Sandy Macbean did not seem able to settle the point, so he rode away."

Ginevra told a story with considerable dramatic emphasis. "Shall *I* be catechised in that fashion when I go to see you after the races?" cried Gilmore. "Tell me Mrs. Gryce's weakest point, so that I may find favour in her sight."

"I don't think that she has any weak point except her heart, which is divided between her Cochin China fowls and me," said Ginevra. "She brought me up, and—— Hush! we must not talk any more. Mr. Medlicott is going to make a speech. He invariably seizes the opportunity when it occurs, and Mrs. Medlicott frowns, for he will always allude to early days, and make a point of referring to her as the most satisfactory of his Australian possessions."

Her manner placed Gilmore again at his ease, and restored the self-confidence which a few minutes before had trembled in the society of this little child of nature. "Miss Rolt," he said, "I begin to perceive that in spite of your avowed ignorance of the world, you have a fine talent for sarcasm. Should you object to such a compliment paid you by your husband after thirty years of matrimonial life?"

"Yes; for there should be no need for compliments between husband and wife. Listen!"

Mr. Medlicott was now on his legs and using his favourite figure of speech. "I bet you a shilling, ladies and gentlemen, that you all make a smart guess at what I am going to say to you. The everlasting theme of my eloquence, they tell me, ladies and gentlemen, is Leichardt's Land, the queen of the colonies! All I can say is that there could not be a more inspiring subject. The last time that I spoke in public in England at a large agricultural dinner in Woodfordshire, my friend Lord Ryvedale was in the chair. 'Mr. Medlicott,' said the noble lord, 'I have to thank you for the very graphic picture you have drawn of Australian life.' 'My lord,' answered I, 'I wish that I could show you *every* phase of life in the Antipodes. If I could you would see a great deal that would surprise and delight you.' And such a phase as I find exhibited in this festive scene and occasion —the blooming faces gathered round me, etc.—et cetera—would—et cetera. . . ."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAGIC OF A WALTZ.

THE stream of Mr. Medlicott's eloquence was at length checked by sounds of joyous music without, and an adjournment was abruptly made from the tent to the woolshed. Ginevra, leaning upon Gilmore's arm, passed out with the crowd. A huge bonfire which had been lighted by the blacks illuminated the height. Strange dusky figures moved in the glow. Light streamed from the open doorway of the low raftered building. The moon shone high and clear. The tall gum trees were tremblingly defined against the sky. All was fantastic, shadowy, uncertain.

Gilmore drew his companion a little closer to his side. "Come," he whispered. He longed to hold her in his arms. He longed to intensify that magnetic thrill which the lightest contact with her frame produced in his own. Pure and star-like her eyes met his. They had passed beneath the vine festoons; she had yielded herself to his embrace, and was borne along upon a wave of delightful motion.

The room was crowded. Girls, buxom, slim, and angular; men, muscular, awkward, adroit, jostled or avoided, or clung to each other in the whirl. But Ginevra, her feet instinctively tuning themselves to the measure, buoyed by Gilmore's strong arm, realizing that his hint of proficiency had been no empty boast, swept on in smooth safety.

They paused.

"Oh, Ginevra," said Gilmore, "why did you tell me that you could not waltz? Are you happy? Have I taught you to enjoy a new pleasure?"

Ginevra's lips were radiant, but in her eyes there was an expression of dreamy languor. "Tell me," she said impulsively. "Have you ever lain among the grass upon a spring day here, when the buds trembled in the wind, and the bees hummed, and the butterflies and birds flew low down above your head? Air, sunshine, sweet sounds and scent, and swift movement make the poetry of existence to the bird; and in dancing and music there is poetry for me."

"My bird, my bird!" murmured Gilmore almost below his

breath. "Life holds sweeter possibilities than you in your childlike existence can dream of. Wild, free, wistful creature!" he went on tenderly. "How would it fare away from its sunlit forests? . . . Ginevra," he added abruptly, "have you any wish to visit Europe?"

The dreaminess in Ginevra's eyes deepened. "Europe!" she repeated. "All that I have read of and have pictured in my imagination. . . . There one would have the past; here one has only the present; and the setting sun is more glorious than the dawn. Yes; I think all Australian girls must wish to see Europe."

"Oh, that I could take you there—or anywhere, so that we two might be together always, sharing each other's thoughts, each intensifying the other's life," whispered Gilmore passionately.

He placed his arm round her waist as he spoke, and they glided on again. Ginevra drew a deep breath, as with unconscious *abandon* her form swayed reed-like in response to the pressure of Gilmore's arm. Lights, music, the tread of feet, and murmur of tongues seemed to vanish and die away from eye and ear. She heard only Brian's voice. . . . To be alone with him. . . . Were they not alone now in this glorious, yet unreal world which their love had created? Love. . . . Was *this* love?—this soft bewildering ecstasy—this holy rapture. . . . And it was spring-time; and the instinct which made the birds joyous, and whispered of heaven, and brought into vividness all the dim yearnings of her pent-up soul, stirred Ginevra's heart, and told her that she loved.

Now had come the moment of self-knowledge. Ginevra knew no sense of shame or of doubt lest she should have given her love unsought. Her being was filled with awe, and maidenly wonder such as Eve might have felt when she stood before Adam in the garden of Paradise. Before her was a rich, untasted world, full of unknown beauty and strangeness. Nature had brought her forth—a true woman. She longed to tread these mysterious regions; and yet she trembled and was afraid.

When the dance was over, Brian led her out away from the lights and laughter. He laid his hand upon hers which rested on his arm; and they walked for some minutes in silence along a narrow unfrequented path that led round the hill towards the front of the garden. The air was sweet with

the scent of datura flowers. Before them stretched the plain, like a boundless shadowy sea, with here and there broken gleams upon its surface where the moon shone upon swamp or lagoon. Upon their left, a little distance off, was the native camp, its fires glowing against the dim background of scrub and hill; while dusky, half-clothed figures clustered round the blaze, and naked piccaninnies joined hands and flitted round like so many imps in a hellish saturnalia, their gabble mingling with the music which floated out from the woolshed.

"Ginevra," murmured Gilmore. "Ginevra, are you angry with me?"

There was no answer.

"Ginevra," he entreated, "speak to me."

"No," she said very low; "I am not angry . . . but I . . ."

"You are trembling. I have startled you, oh, my sweet frightened dove. Don't you know that I would do anything rather than vex you? How is it possible that you can understand yourself? A child yesterday; a woman to-day. I have spoken too suddenly. You don't know how your youth and your ignorance of the world touch me, how I reverence you, how ashamed I feel of my impetuosity. I would be so patient and gentle if patience and gentleness would gain for me the thing which I long for. . . . But I said . . . if friendship ought not to be measured by hours, how much less love? You make me unlike myself. I am happy and sad at the same moment—daring and timid. . . . Ginevra, tell me, that if I were to take you away—alone with me to another country—you would not be afraid to go. Tell me that you would be happy with me; that in time you might learn to love me."

She tried to speak, hesitated, broke down. His pulses throbbed triumphantly at the evidence of her sweet confusion. But he still urged her.

"Ginevra, tell me."

"I am not afraid of you," she whispered brokenly; "but I could not go away—and—and I don't think you ought to ask me that other question."

"Not yet—but later; and then you will reply. I will try not to shock or alarm you; I wish only that you should know what is in my heart. I don't expect any reply now; but give me one of those roses which you are wearing. Let it be a

token that I am forgiven, and that we are friends! Then we will talk of this no more to-night, but will go back and dance again light-heartedly."

The flowers at her bosom rose and fell with her breath. He laid his hand upon them, and his heart bounded, as, unrebuked, he detached the blossom and transferred it to his own breast.

He lifted the white-gloved hand to his lips, and thus the compact was sealed. For a moment both kept silence, and then turned back again towards the woolshed. The flashing forth of light was the signal for turning the current of conversation towards indifferent matters. Mr. Peverton met them at the entrance.

"Miss Rolt, I have been looking for you everywhere. This is my galop."

Ginevra was borne off. When that dance was over, Mr. Medlicott approached her, followed by a bevy of gentlemen eager for an introduction. By and by it was Gilmore's turn again, and again—and again.

As the evening waned, the crowd in the woolshed gradually thinned. Most of the non-dancers were divided in impulse between the excitement of looking on at the performances of their neighbours, solicitude for the welfare of their race-horses, and a vague preference for rum-and-water and tobacco in the Bachelors' Quarters. Some few of the more uproarious spirits had stretched themselves upon the grass outside, and were singing comic songs to the accompaniment of a Jew's harp and a monotonous "tum tum" chorus from the blacks' camp; while the elderly squatters, all of one mind concerning the merits of horse-racing as a mode of enhancing the value of their respective brands, but entertaining a contemptuous toleration for the lighter pastime, had retired to the tents, there to discourse upon bovine matters, cross-breeds, mustering, branding, and the most effectual methods of dealing with marsupials and wild horses. After the indiscretions of that ever-to-be-remembered first waltz, Gilmore carefully refrained from sentimental allusions, and succeeded so well in dispelling the constraint under which, during the earlier part of the evening, Ginevra had suffered, that towards its close his impassioned words seemed to her part of a dream, and she was laughing without any embarrassing consciousness while they compared notes of their several experiences.

Ginevra waxed humourously sarcastic upon the subject of her adorers.

"Mr. Sandy Macbean has at last effected an introduction," said she. "I have learned that he is six feet seven inches in his boots; that he has a Selection of twelve thousand acres, and eight hundred head of cattle; and that he is going to build a new house with stone chimneys, and a verandah. Also that he sings *The Maniac*, with appropriate gestures, and that Tragedy is his *forte*. And all the time that he is talking to a lady, he rubs his nose with a red silk pocket-handkerchief rolled up in a compact little ball. Now who have you been dancing with?"

"I walked—nay, strolled—through a set of quadrilles with the heroine of the pack-horse, who you will be glad to hear has received a bulletin from the stockman, to the effect that her wardrobe has been recovered from the banks of the 'One-eyed Waterhole.' Then I piloted a very warlike young lady through the Lancers, in the course of which some interesting facts concerning pleuro-pneumonia were made known to me, and my sympathies enlisted upon behalf of the unfortunate and tailless sufferers by inoculation. Miss Rolt, your researches into the subject of snake-poisoning commands my entire interest; but I am glad that you don't enter into that of inoculation."

"And I am glad," answered Ginevra, with a conscious laugh, "that you do not rub your nose with a red silk pockethandkerchief."

"Since we are so well agreed, why should we not dance together the whole of to-morrow evening?" he rejoined, drawing her to him and gliding with her to the centre of the almost empty floor.

* * * * * *

All was stillness at Birrali. Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott reposed upon their connubial couch. The maidens in the large house were wrapped in soft slumber. The woolshed was deserted save by the musicians, who had spread their blankets upon the waxed floor, and were sleeping peacefully beneath the drooping wreaths which festooned the chandeliers. The lights at the head station were extinguished. There remained only the glow of the blacks' fires, and the sparks from the gentlemen's pipes, where, down by the lagoon, groups of sleepless bushmen were clustered in the moonlight,

noisily speculating upon the probable winner of the Birrali Cup, or enlivening the night with "yarns" of overlanding or adventure, which seemed provocative of the most uproarious mirth.

Gilmore, a prey to sleeplessness and excitement, had left his tent, and having fallen in with Captain Gordon, of the border, had strolled round by one of the outlying fires, where a circle of roughs, including Taddy Walsh the postman, Ex-Inspector Cooper, and Perseverance Dick, had gathered round a half-burned log, and were hobnobbing over their pipes and billy of tea.

"There's nothing like an Australian race-meeting for smoothing down little differences," remarked Captain Gordon. "The last time I saw three of that lot together, Perseverance Dick was escorted by Inspector Cooper and Taddy Walsh, on his way to gaol, and they stopped at my station to have the warrant endorsed for crossing the border. I'll take my oath there is some capital yarning going on there; and if I'm not greatly mistaken I caught the sound of my own name. Come, let us hear a good story, Taddy, if you've got one. I don't mind its being told against myself."

Taddy Walsh burst into a gruff laugh. Inspector Cooper slapped his sides, and Perseverance Dick, slinking somewhat into the background, executed a series of suppressed chuckles.

"Savin' your presence, Cap'n," rejoined the postman, "it ain't much of a joke, but you are welcome to it—just a little rise that persevering blackguard"—indicating Dick by a flourish of his pipe—"took out of you, last time we passed down by Bingewogarie. . . . The cheek of him! 'Brought you a prisoner, Cap'n,' calls out Cooper. 'Here I am again, Cap'n,' says Dick—'couldn't keep away from you, Cap'n—so fond of you on this side of the border; 'osses again, and a real good un this time, be blowed to it.'"

"And she wur a beauty," regretfully interjected Dick from behind. "If you'd seen her, Cap'n, you'd have said she wur worth four months of quod."

The postman again took up the tale. "Always obliging and 'ospitérable, is the Cap'n. None of your close Accommodation House tricks at Bingewogarie. 'You'll come and have a feed and stop the night, Cooper,' says he. 'Thank you, Cap'n, must get on,' says Inspector there. 'We keep a sharp eye to business, sir, and Dick is a dodger.' 'Well,

anyhow, have a glass of grog, Cooper. They'll keep a look-out on the prisoner in the kitchen.' So we offs our nags and into the dining-room. 'Fill for yourself, Teddy,' says the Cap'n. That's what I calls handsome. Gad, I didn't mind if I did. 'Here's to you, sir,'—uplifting the billy of tea, —'and thank ye kindly for past favours.'

"When we goes out, Evans, he's in the kitchen, tucking into his salt beef and damper. 'I know what you've been up to,' says he—'you and the Inspector. What do you bet me now that I don't bamboozle the Cap'n out of a nobbler?' So we doesn't see as how we can bet with our prisoner, but we gives him to understand it's all ekal, and he sends a message in to the Cap'n. 'Please, sir, Dick Evans wants to speak to you.' Out runs the Cap'n, and Dick he screws up his jaw, and he doubles himself in two. 'Oh my, Cap'n! Ugh, sir! oh, it's hagony! oh, my poor tooth! I shouldn't like to disappoint the Inspector, but I ain't fit to go before a police magistrate. O Lord! it *is* hagony, sir.' The Cap'n he runs for creosote, and Dick he splutters. 'Oh my, sir—ugh! That *be* nasty! It's gone down my throat. O Lord, it's worse than toothache! You hain't got anything just to wash the taste out, sir.' Lord, if he doesn't get his grog; and Cooper and me ready to split our sides; but he's a gentleman, is the Cap'n, and a rare good sort, savin' his presence, though he wur done by Perseverance Dick over that there toothache."

Under cover of the laugh which followed Taddy Walsh's story, Gilmore moved away. At any other time he might have been amused by an illustration of the incongruities of Antipodean life; to-night he was in no mood for merriment. He walked on to the further marge of the lagoon. The white tents lay like swans with folded wings before him; the curlew's cry was hushed; in the east one faint light-streak heralded dawn; below him the closed buds of the lilies floated upon the surface of the lake; and the moonbeams kissed the water tenderly.

His pulses were throbbing: every sense seemed preternaturally quickened; and his thoughts drifted backward.

For four years, save only during his brief visits to the capital, he had led a rough life, unsweetened by feminine society, or by any gracious or lovely influences. Four years of toil—of disgust—of vague remorse! Only a certain

strength of will, which had enabled him to chalk out, and for a time pursue, a definite career had sustained him in this period of self-hatred and almost despair. For though habit might have turned him into a voluptuary, his nature still sheltered strong undepraved instinct, which had waited only for opportunity to rise up in rebellion against the tyranny of vice. The enforced solitude and asceticism of existence on the Barcoo had created a crisis in his moral history. What though his mind still harboured foul images, and memory was a temptation to be fought with and overcome, there was consolation in the knowledge that something better in him strained upward in passionate yearning towards purity. The heart's sanctuary cannot be wholly defiled when a shadowy ideal still lingers in its innermost recesses. And now this angel stepped forth, noble, clear-eyed, and revealed herself in the shape of Ginevra.

This was no ephemeral sentiment, no idle passion. Never had he experienced an emotion so poignant and compelling. Never in like manner had infatuation for a woman so thrilled and penetrated his being. Ah yes, once—ere guilt had killed love, and weariness had followed possession. . . . Strangely, now, in the very presence, as it were, of the new unsullied love, the old passion rose, not a spectre-like image of the past, but living, breathing, beautiful, blending in imagination with the vision of Ginevra till he hardly knew which reigned in his heart—it or she.

"There *is* a likeness," he exclaimed, half aloud. "Some trick of the eyes or lips, some curve of the brows, some droop of the eyelids, which poisons my thoughts and makes me see double. Oh cursed abyss of memory! Is there no possibility of soaring upward into clear free air?" He stooped and plucked from its stem one of the folded buds which lay sleeping upon the bosom of the lagoon. "My lily!" he murmured passionately; my bud of purity with the fragrant heart wrapped close till dawn shall unveil its beauty! . . ." Suddenly, as though smitten by some horrible thought, he flung the lily far from him into the lake. "Oh, my God!" he muttered, "if it *were* possible! What a revolting, devilish suggestion!"

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRRALI RACES.

DAWN had broken in the east; a west wind stirred the eucalyptus leaves and stiffened the little pennons on the race-course; but the lily floated limp and petal-shrouded upon the tiny wavelets of the lagoon, and Gilmore lay in his tent wrapped in that profound sleep which often succeeds a wakeful or dream-haunted night.

The stillness around Birrali had been but of short duration. Almost as soon as the night notes of plaintive curlew and moaning dingoe, the gabble of the natives and hoarse murmur of men's voices, had died away, the morning echoes rose; and there sounded the sharp *s'tw't* of the stockwhips, the lowing of milkers driven towards the stockyard, the tramp of horses' feet, the cooëes ringing o'er the plain,—all the hue and clangour which ushers in day on an Australian station.

The sun was high ere Ginevra stirred in half slumber, and her eyelids slowly unsealed to meet his rays, as though the spirit returned reluctantly from the land of dreams, where kisses had pressed her lips, and warm fingers had clasped hers feverishly, and sad brown eyes had passionately bent themselves upon her face.

She lay in a state of dreamy consciousness upon her pillow, watching the vine-shadows athwart her window-blind, and the sunbeams making a network upon the wooden floor of her little verandah room, her limbs lying limp beneath the coverlet, which scarce hid their rounded outline, one arm curved above her head, with hair scattered wide, cheeks rose-flushed, and chest half-bared, pure as a drifted snowflake, rising and falling in sweet obedience to the quick breath that came from between her parted lips. Her frame thrilled with vague delicious ecstasy. Oh happy maiden, awakening for the first time into a world made glorious by love!

And yet Ginevra knew not why she was happy. Radiant day!—sweet mysterious night!—melodious voice which had whispered in her ear!—eloquent eyes which had cast upon her so divine a spell!

Was it a dream, then?

Ah no! The bunch of faded roses lay beside her, and one was missing.

Now all the world was astir. The great bell of the station clanged loudly, telling the girl that it was more than time to rise. Ginevra sprang to the window and drew the curtains a finger's-breadth apart. The garden was ablaze with gladioli and orange begonia. Below her lay the plain, with the lagoon glowing, and flags floating over the racecourse, and men and horses hurrying through the lush grass. Mr. Medlicott was airing himself upon the gravel-walk, and—yes—she started back from the window—it was Gilmore, who not without some curiosity as to the chamber Ginevra might be inhabiting, was surveying the casements that looked out upon the garden.

When she came out, dressed in her habit, he was standing on the verandah, a breast-knot of fresh roses and heliotrope in his hand.

He held the bouquet towards her. "It is my turn to give you flowers," he said meaningly, and hoped that she had slept well and dreamed happily.

Ginevra blushed under the consciousness of her joyous dreams. "And you?" she asked hurriedly.

"Do not question me; I passed a miserable night; I was feverish and excited. The air seemed full of sounds and visions. I wandered round the lagoon till dawn, and when I slept at last, your face haunted me, and seemed by its expression of sadness and terror to warn me of sorrow to come. Are the Fates avenging themselves so soon?"

"*I* warned you!" repeated Ginevra thoughtfully. "*I* caused your sleep to be troubled."

"Dreams of you ought to make night Paradise," said Gilmore, looking at her intently. "I don't know why your image perplexes and troubles me," he added impulsively. "It is as though Destiny had brought us together and Superstition held us apart. You are a Fatalist. You told me so that evening on the river. It is a strange thought that the course of your life and of mine may have been determined by the falling of a coin."

"I—you do not know," faltered Ginevra; then said contradictorily: "It must be the same in the lives of all, only no one realizes the fateful moment till it has passed."

Gilmore still looked at her with an earnestness that made her droop her eyes.

"Tell me," he asked suddenly and irrelevantly, "whom are you supposed to resemble? Is it your father or your mother?"

"My mother died long ago in India. I have never seen a picture of her. Once when I asked Daddy—he told me that all had been destroyed. His manner was strange, and I never dared to renew the subject. He must have loved her very dearly, since to speak of her gives him pain. If it were I who had loved and lost, I think my joy would be in keeping green the memory of my past happiness. . . . Sometimes I fancy that I recollect her," continued Ginevra dreamily; "and I have a dim vision of dark loving eyes and sad lips, and I long —oh long—that I could just once feel them pressed against mine! But her face, and other faces of the past, come to me only sometimes—shadowy, and imperfect like a half-forgotten picture; and when I try to look back I can see only a confused blur, and waves—and then Birrali. . . . Ah! if I had a mother who loved me, I should want nothing—nothing else in the world."

The bell clanged again, and one by one, there trooped out from the house twenty or more young girls dressed like Ginevra in riding costume.

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Medlicott, taking Ginevra's hand. "You and Colonel Gilmore may sit one on each side and help me to pour out tea. I wish that I had one of my daughters here, though I cannot regret that they are happily married; and I shall make use of you instead. And that reminds me to tell you that young ladies ought occasionally to sit by their chaperones, and that you must not dance with Sandy Macbean or any other lout who chooses to ask you. Did you ever see such a man as Mr. Medlicott, Colonel Gilmore? There he is, fingering the horses' legs, and chaffing Perseverance Dick. Tenants' dinners, agricultural shows, county balls, and Australian races,—I declare it is all one to him; he enjoys everything."

Breakfast was a short, noisy meal. The stockyard, in which the process of saddling was going on, was at this time the centre of interest, and all, including the ladies, were anxious for a canter round the course before the racing commenced.

At half-past ten the noise outside became Babel. Stock-whips were being cracked, dogs were barking, black boys shouting. The courtyard was thronged with men and horses, and gay with racing-jackets and fluttering rosettes. Well-freighted buggies were streaming out through the slip-rails; riders, with the reins low upon their horses' necks, were cantering down from the stables; ladies were being mounted; and soon a gay procession was filing down towards the plain, where already several smart carriages from the important stations in the neighbourhood had taken up their position on a little knoll facing the winning-post.

Then came the stretching gallop across the flat, the scurrying of frightened herds driven from their pasture grounds, the timid essaying of the water-jump, and then as if by magic the crowd had congregated round the judge's enclosure, where Mr. Medlicott, upon a handsome bay thoroughbred, had stationed himself, and was smiling blandly upon the excited crowd which his hospitality had caused to congregate. The racers came out from the saddling-paddock, and the proceedings of the day began.

Never, so every one said, had there appeared so bright a prospect of a successful meeting. The district mustered in round numbers about two hundred strong. All were anxious to do honour to Mr. Medlicott. All hoped to detain the great squatter a short time longer among them. Several political magnates had arrived that morning from the capital. Two ministers were present. Even viceroyalty drove over from its summer residence among the mountains; and with the Governor and his party, an English Earl and Countess, who were making the grand tour of the colonies, and were delighted to take part in a genuine Bush entertainment.

Ginevra looked with a child's awe at these notabilities, and was disappointed to see that Lady Silverdene was only a pretty, lively little woman dressed in a print gown and straw hat, while her lord in his cabbage-tree wide-awake and white linen suit, might have been mistaken for a veritable colonist. Nevertheless both attracted considerable attention, for snobbery is not unknown in Australia, and, in spite of the contempt which colonists profess to entertain for adventitious distinctions, rank there as elsewhere commands homage.

Gilmore had known these people in England, had flirted with Lady Silverdene before she married, and had shot over

her husband's preserves, consequently was delighted to meet both on unfamiliar ground.

Lady Silverdene, a little bored by Mr. Medlicott's attentions, called Gilmore to her side. She was a bright little creature, and full of enthusiasm, half of which was affected. . . . If this were bush life, then she should like always to live in the bush. She would have her own string of racers and pack of kangaroo hounds. She wondered that people did not come out to Australia instead of going to Egypt and Algiers and South America. As for Mr. Trollope's opinion that the Australians were too fond of *blowing*, she didn't agree with him; in fact, she did not think that they "blew" half enough; if to *blow* meant to announce one's good opinion of Australia, then she should *blow* too when she returned to Woodfordshire. She was half Australian already. She had insisted upon seeing the cows bailed up that morning. She wanted to see a squatter bailed up. Regretted intensely that she had not met a bushranger. As for the blacks, they were delicious—so picturesque in their red blankets. Would Colonel Gilmore compile a vocabulary of their funny words? *Budgery* would be quite an addition to her slang dictionary. . . . Was it true that Colonel Gilmore had sold his station, and, if he was going to England, why would he not return with them *viâ* San Francisco? They wanted to get home in January before the hunting was over; and did Colonel Gilmore know that Sir Percy was no longer master of the Grately hounds, and that his son had married an American, who it was reported would be *the* beauty of next season? Why did not Colonel Gilmore marry an Australian beauty and set a new fashion? People were getting tired of admiring Transatlantic belles, and to be sure there was more novelty in crossing the Pacific, etc. etc.

Ginevra, for the nonce deserted, listened to this prattle, and turned away with a qualm of pain. These people belonged to Gilmore's world. They and he had interests in which she could not share. This was strongly and painfully borne in upon Ginevra's mind as she watched her lover's animated gestures. For the first time in her life she felt jealous. All the beauty of the day had gone for her, and, instead of pleasant exhilaration, she experienced dull aching. But if Gilmore's protestations of the night before had meant nothing, at least she would not allow him to suspect that she

was unhappy. Presently Miss Sloper and Mr. Peverton proposed that they should all ride round the course to examine the jumps. The young Amazon, who had been jealous of Ginevra the night before, had watched the girl's face, and held her barbed arrow ready to shoot.

"These English swells are all alike," she remarked maliciously. "They make themselves agreeable till one of their own set appears on the scene, and then we may whistle for them in vain. Mark my words. Colonel Gilmore will pay attention to no one but Lady Silverdene till the evening comes, and then, when she has gone, he will be glad enough, Miss Rolt, to dance with you or me or any one else."

Ginevra bore the attack bravely. Fortunately they had now reached the water-jump; and Miss Sloper, anxious to exhibit her horsemanship to Mr. Peverton, declared her intention of clearing it without placing her foot in the stirrup. How she fell on the other side, and how the tall hat, which had been the pride of the Birrali squadron, was crushed to the flatness of a pancake, is recorded in the annals of the races.

Her recovery took time, though she was not hurt; nevertheless, when they returned to the carriages, Gilmore was still talking eagerly to Lady Silverdene. Ginevra refused to answer his looks, and maintained a proud, cold demeanour. When Mrs. Medlicott introduced her to these great people, her girlish confidence received another shock. Lady Silverdene, though she was English, and seemed to know a great deal of the world, had never heard of David Rolt or his books; but she was sweet and friendly to Ginevra, and, regarding her as a purely Australian product, took some pains to draw her out.

So the day wore on, in the opinion of some less brilliantly on account of the advent of these representatives of the aristocracy. The great cup race was won by Mr. Sandy Macbean's "Pretty Jane." Miss Sloper's bay filly, "Aunt Sally," came in first for the Maiden Stakes; and, to the indignation of the Bush folk, Mr. Peverton's nag carried off the Ladies' Purse. Are not all these events written in the Chronicles of Birrali? Towards sundown, the viceregal party drove off mid much cheering and waving of hats, and Lady Silverdene's last words to Gilmore rang in Ginevra's ear.

"Now remember, Colonel Gilmore. I shall engage your berth at the same time that we secure ours. Your mother will never forgive me if I tell her that I have met you and have not brought you home. I saw her just after your uncle's death; she finds it difficult to combine a decent show of regret with the exultation she feels at the prospect of having you settled at Little Fretterly. She is dying to beautify the old place, and I am dying to help her. Mind, I shall expect to see you in Melbourne three weeks from now, unless there really is a Transpacific attraction."

The sun set, gilding the crags and turning green and grey to crimson and purple. The winners were led to the stables to receive the feed of corn which their prowess had earned, and the Birrali party wound in a long line up towards the house. "What are those queer white and red things bobbing on the trees in the garden?" cried somebody.

"Never you mind," answered Mr. Medlicott oracularly. "Wait till it is dark. That is my little surprise."

Gilmore lifted Ginevra from her horse, and looked at her wistfully as he set her down. "Are you angry with me?" he said. "You have not allowed me to come near you all day."

Ginevra did not answer, but when she reached her room she flung herself into a chair and covered her face with her hands. She did not know whether to smile or to weep.

The "queer white and red things" were Chinese lanterns which Mr. Medlicott had caused to be hung about the garden. They were lighted, when darkness left the plain, and the blacks, to whom such an illumination was a natural phenomenon, presaging either weal or misfortune, they could not tell which, corroboreed and wailed by turns round their camp-fires, while Pint-pot remarked confidentially to his master: "My word! Debbil Debbil make budgery* light. Mine think it stars tumble down, and old Combo go bong† this moon."

All was uproar in the tent. The health of the cup-winner was drunk, and Mr. Sandy Macbean, not without the asistance of his pocket-handkerchief, made a suitable reponse. Mr. Medlicott, in vulgar parlance, fired off an oration; and an invisible chorus of roughs, shearers, and shepherds, led by Perseverance Dick, sang outside to the tune of "For he's a

* "budgery" = good. † Old Combo will die this month.

jolly good fellow" some laudatory doggrel composed for the occasion by the postman, who was the poet of the district. Mr. Peverton returned thanks for the ladies, and gave point to his eloquence by sundry amorous glances cast sideways at Ginevra, whom he had taken in to dinner, having seized a moment when her heart was hardened against Gilmore to carry her off before that gentleman's eyes. At last the banquet came to a close, and strains of music from the wool-shed—the band had been reinforced by a violoncello and a cornet from Yerangil—wooed the dancers.

Gilmore intercepted Ginevra as she quitted the tent.

"Why are you so cruel to me?" he exclaimed reproachfully. "Why did you run away with Mr. Peverton when you saw me coming up to you? Why did you avoid me on the racecourse?"

In spite of his pleading accent, there was triumph in his eyes. A suitor, whatever cause he may have to congratulate himself, cannot feel perfectly certain of a woman till he has made her jealous. Innocent Ginevra, though open to the sensation, would have been at a loss to define it; and had the word's coarser meaning been suggested to her in connection with Gilmore's attentions to a married woman, would have gazed uncomprehendingly at the insinuator.

"I thought that you were tired of me, Colonel Gilmore. You danced with me a great deal last night—and what should you have to say to an ignorant girl like me when you can talk to Lady Silverdene of the people and the life you know?"

"What indeed?" said Gilmore, with covert amusement in his tone. "Miss Rolt, your simplicity is adorable. What should I have to say to a beautiful girl, in whom I am deeply interested, when a faded flirt like Lady Silverdene, about whom I care not a jot, is sitting by?"

A rush of colour suffused Ginevra's face.

"Colonel Gilmore, it may amuse you to pay me compliments, but I am not so foolish as to imagine that you really mean them. I am less ignorant than you fancy. It seems to me that I have learned a great deal during the last fortnight; and I think it is best for me that I should not come to gay meetings like this, but stay at home with Daddy. . . . And you are going away with Lady Silverdene in three weeks," she added lamely.

"All these statements need argument," he answered, laughing. "Do not let us waste precious time now. You will dance this waltz with me?"

"I said—I have promised Mr. Peverton."

"Is not that an infringement of our compact? Am I not at Birrali on the express understanding that all the waltzes are mine? I think you said that I might teach you, though you need instruction as little as a nightingale needs teaching to sing. Miss Rolt, I have the first claim, and I will not forego it, even if it be a case of challenging Mr. Peverton. Come."

And Ginevra yielded, not loth, intoxicated, notwithstanding prudence, by the delicious flattery which he whispered in her ear as he bore her swiftly round.

"Did you really think that I preferred Lady Silverdene's society to yours?" he asked later.

"She belongs to your world, and I do not—and—and Harriet Sloper said that it was always so with Englishmen."

"I am much obliged to Miss Sloper for her flattering opinion. But why do you speak in that way of my 'world'? Do you then think it so vastly inferior to yours?"

"My father and I are alone," said Ginevra proudly. "He is a man of genius, and I—am his daughter. That is all."

"Grandly spoken. You disdain all association with Europe. Did you not admit to me only last night that there was for you some charm in the thought of visiting England? Has my home, have my interests, become suddenly so distasteful to you?"

"Oh no, no," exclaimed Ginevra in a distressed tone. "You know that it is not so. But my lot is different,—it lies here; and England can never be more to me than the country of a dream."

Later in the evening, when he had danced with her many times, Gilmore paused with his partner under the festooned archway. "Ginevra," he whispered impulsively, "I said that I would be patient, but I can be patient no longer. Sweet, I will be gentle, but not patient. Do you remember my saying to you—in Leichardt's Town—that I might have something to tell you—here—at night—when we were alone. Darling, you will listen now."

They went out together, away from the lights, the throng, the music, the jarring sound of laughter, into a region of stillness and poetry.

Both felt as it were the touch of an invisible hand. In the mind of each was the sense of divine mystery and anticipation. They were like children walking along an enchanted way which to the one who has traversed it before was new again, wonderful and glorious; to the other unknown, and shrouded in glamour and strange delight. Like children they clasped hands. Ginevra was trembling. His touch brought strength and a feeling of rapture such as she had never known. It seemed to her that she stood apart from her destiny; never more could it be determined by will of hers; henceforth it must be bound in his. But her bosom heaved with awe and exultation such as might have befitted a girl martyr whose fate it was to be led forth the bride of Heaven.

Neither spoke, but the silence was speech.

He turned away from the path leading towards the house, and presently entered a thicket of uncleared scrub which had been left as an ornamental belt of foliage. Thus he led her by a winding walk arched by tangled creepers and fragrant with jasmine bloom, to the border of the lagoon.

The lilies slept in the moonlight and the water rippled against the sedge. They stood for several moments; and neither moved or spoke lest by some untoward word or gesture the enchantment might be broken. Ginevra's head was a little drooped; and the breeze ruffled her hair and blew against him the folds of her dress. Before them stretched the immense solitude, and they were all in shadow, and Ginevra stood, white like an angel, against the dusky trees. But the sweet ripe lips and dimpled shoulders were human and beautiful. Gilmore drew closer, and his arm stole round her waist.

Ginevra did not resist the pressure. She could feel his heart beating close to her own. Then it was as though a spring snapped within her, and her form swayed towards his, and panted in his embrace. He bent his head and kissed her neck. Intoxicating contact! And now arms strained more closely. Lips met lips in warm wedlock.

"Ginevra," said Gilmore, "I love you. . . ."

CHAPTER XI.

LOVERS.

"Oh butterfly, come and settle on me! Oh bird, sing to me! Oh bee, fly over me, for there is not a happier girl in all the world than I am to-day."

So spake Ginevra.

She was in a leaning posture, her shoulders resting against a fallen moss-grown tree, which stretched its hoary length upon a little plateau jutting out from the hill that rose up behind the great Birrali plain.

Velvetty couch-grass carpeted the knoll; long withes of greenish-grey moss—commonly termed old men's beards—cushioned Ginevra's seat. All around her grew the scentless wild violets; and orchids and immortelles spangled the slope.

Above her head reared a lank eucalyptus tree, which every now and then, stirred by the breeze, scattered its honeyed blossoms upon the ground, and upon her shoulders, and her hair. The atmosphere was warm and balmy, and full of murmurings and perfumes which bore to the girl's soul a vague, delicious sense of unreality. No human being was in sight on the plain below; the cows lay in lazy content, and the horses bent their heads over the pasture, and browsed, heeding not the lovers; a myriad thoughtless dragon-flies skimmed the lagoon. Ginevra and Gilmore were alone. They were out of sight of the house. Only the crows cawing on their flight to the stock-yard, and the parrakeets and cockatoos, chattering above, had opportunity for closely observing and commenting upon the loving looks, the frequent caresses, which were interchanged between those two upon that dream-like spring afternoon.

The races were over. The guests had departed. The noise and bustle of the last three days had given place to an almost unnatural quietude. The racecourse was deserted, pennons had been pulled down, tents had disappeared. Peace reigned over Birrali.

Gilmore lay stretched upon the grass beside Ginevra, who, pliant and languid as a white lily, leaned towards him, sometimes softly brushing her shoulder against his, or touching

his cheek with her hand. She was tired, as might have been expected after the vigils and excitement of the past week, and half lost in dreamy wonder at this new phase of being into which she had passed. Was she alone in this blissful experience, or did it necessarily enter the lot of all women? Introspective as she was by tendency, her sensations now became a source of interest and surprise to herself. Where would they lead her? What new and wonderful revelations would she receive? Could that heaven of which she had read and sometimes dreamed, offer higher bliss than this human joy of reciprocated love?

And to him, in her radiant innocence, she seemed the embodied type of all that he had ever deemed best, sweetest, and highest; the daughter of nature; the spirit of those wild woods and jagged mountains among which she had been nurtured.

"I am so happy," she murmured. "Why do they say that life is sad when there is in it a thing so beautiful as love?"

"And you love me, Ginevra, with your heart—with your soul?"

"Ah, Brian! to love you makes me feel that I have a soul."

"It is holy; it is glorious—this love; for when in our bodily presence we are apart from one another, our souls are joined and can know no separation. Is not this thought beautiful? For us, parting and death should be robbed of their direst terrors."

"Oh, do not speak of death—of parting! Why cloud the present by gloomy forebodings of the future?"

"Change would be more bitter," answered Gilmore mournfully—"or disillusion. Would either be possible, Ginevra?"

"Never, never. I *must* love you till I die, Brian—and perhaps," she added dreamily—"perhaps in the great 'Hereafter.' I cannot, I *will* not, believe that my heart which has the power of loving so intensely, and my soul which yearns for the best life an immortality can give, are doomed to sink into eternal nothingness. . . . But death is so far off—and change an impossibility—and we shall never be parted."

"Perhaps for a little while, Ginevra, but only to meet again, and be joined in a lifetime of happiness. . . . Oh, my saving angel, whose gentle hand shall open for me the gates of Paradise, which I had thought closed against me for ever!

. . . But the future is a phantom eluding our grasp, when possession seems a certainty; and the past a hateful, devilish incubus, clinging, suffocating, and poisoning with its horrible breath every pure thought, every noble aspiration. What right had I even to dream of winning *you?* Child: is it true? For you are but a child—unformed, inexperienced; ignorant of your own wants and capacities. . . . And this has been so sudden."

Ginevra raised her face from his breast where it had been hidden, and met his troubled gaze with a look arch and confiding.

"No; you forget that we are both fatalists. We have always belonged to each other; and when you appealed to Destiny, we were only blindly obeying her laws. Why do you look so grave, Brian?"

"My life has not been like yours, Ginevra; and I am more than twice your age."

"And would you wish me to be older? Should you prefer me with wrinkles and crow's-feet and grey hair?' Ginevra laughed softly, but her voice trembled as she continued: "You said that you loved me for my youth, and my freshness, and——" She halted, and her eyes spoke the rest.

"And for all that makes you what you are," added Brian impetuously; "and for the good which has entered into me through my love for you. Oh, my darling, forgive me if I seem grave and gloomy. I am so happy that at times I can hardly believe in the reality of my joy. Every day, every hour it deepens and intensifies. I am afraid of it. All that I see or hear or touch connects me in some subtle manner with you. There is nothing for me in the world but you—for you are my very being. . . . I picture you in the old house at Fretterly, my wife, my pride, my joy; and tender thoughts fill my heart, and life seems to promise so much beauty, that I wonder at the goodness of God. . . . But then a black mood seizes me, and I ask myself if, after all, this glimpse of heaven may not be a kind of devil's torture—a form of punishment. Then it appears to me impossible that you can love me with a woman's deep, changeless love. For you are an imaginative child, Ginevra, and I am the first at whose bidding you have drawn aside your veil of maidenly reserve. It is more than possible that your fancy only may have been touched, not your heart. . . ." He waited a moment,

but she answered nothing, and he went on in still graver tones: "The first kisses pressed on a girl's lips are like wine; and they may produce a kind of moral intoxication, which may end in nausea. Oh, my love, think of the misery of cold companionhip, forced smiles, unwilling caresses. Think of the intolerable remorse which would be my portion should the time ever come in which you reproached me for taking advantage of your childish trust to make you my wife."

"Oh, Brian, you pain me. Will you not believe that I love you unalterably? And I am not a child—I am a woman. Come," and she playfully lifted her hand to his lips. "We have been serious long enough. Let us think now only of how beautiful the day is, and of how happy we are."

"Oh wise woman!" answered Brian, his voice changing in response to her appeal. "Wise woman of seventeen! Live in the hour—at least, you have learned the philosophy of enjoyment. But all the philosophy in the world does not get over the fact that I am past forty, and that counting by hours you have known me barely five days. That I should wish to make you mine is natural enough; but it is more strange that in so short a time you should be willing to give yourself to me."

"And why more strange that I should care for you than that you should love me?" asked Ginevra, as she plucked a blade of grass and put in between her red lips.

"A man of my age must necessarily have had many opportunities of seeing life, and is sufficiently experienced to know the kind of woman most likely to make him happy. I was certain—even before I met you—that if I ever married, it would be some lovely, innocent girl, with whom I shall fall madly in love in the course of a few hours. You see, I understood myself, though I was hardly conceited enough to hope that my ideal would stoop to me. But you—what did you know of the world or of men? How could you tell who would come riding over the hills to bear you away? It might have been Mr. Peverton or Sandy Macbean, though God forbid that you should have desired to go with either."

"Or the postman, or Mr. Medlicott's stockman," interjected Ginevra irefully.

"It might have been *any one*—an Australian, an Englishman; a younger man than I, who would have taken your hand saying, 'Ginevra, come,' and you would have gone as

trustingly as you now promise to go with me. There is more than one Fairy Prince in the world; and the garden of Paradise is confined to no particular region."

"And I was waiting, watching—waiting to be lightly wooed, to be lightly won," said Ginevra in plaintive reproach. "Ah, Brian, leave me then. Go; and I will try to be patient till another suitor rides this way. Hasten his coming; for love is sweet, and happiness is becoming a necessity to me."

"Ginevra! Tease! You are wicked, cruel, to say such things."

"I learn wisdom from you."

There was a sweet silence; and the butterflies came closer; and an inquisitive satin-bird alighted at Ginevra's feet.

"Tell me," whispered Ginevra, with a note of raillery in her voice—"since you are so experienced, so wise, by what signs should I know that I love you?"

"Your face is burning, darling; and your heart beats, and you tremble when I press you to me. Do you need to ask what are the signs of love?"

"But you said," murmured Ginevra, with her breath upon his cheek—"you said, that this was intoxication which might pass away."

"I retract. True love, my Ginevra, has a sanctity of its own. If your heart is wholly mine, life apart from me should seem but half existence, and marriage with another worse than death. Sleeping or waking I should be near you—in speech or in silence our souls should be in communion; and the horizon of each life should be spanned by the other's thoughts."

"There is one point," said Ginevra presently, "only one, in which my feelings don't quite answer to your tests. I should be wretched apart from you. Life without your love would be death; but I could not go away to England or anywhere else and forsake my father."

"It is not a question of forsaking your father, darling. All women who marry must leave their parents. And are you so necessary to Dr. Rolt?"

A shade passed over Ginevra's face. "No," she said. "I am not to him what he is to me; that is true. He told me once that he had determined from the first not to set his heart too strongly upon me, lest he should receive only indifference in return. Somehow that saying comforted me.

How little he knew! But I think that I understand him now. He loved my mother so devotedly that when she died he would not fill her place even by her child. That was loyalty, Brian."

"Do you not see then, darling, that he does not wish to bind you to him?" said Gilmore persuasively. "He is anxious that you should marry. Indeed he has said so to Mr. Medlicott."

"I could not go away from Daddy," said the girl again, her eyes moist, her lips trembling. "And he *would* miss me," she went on, after a pause of troubled reflection. "There would be no one to read to him at night, to copy his notes, or look out his references, or help to classify his specimens. There would be no one but Nancy to take care of him if he were ill. He has been quite unlike himself since he went to town. And you see that he needs me, for he has sent Gryce back to take me home to-morrow."

Gilmore caressed and soothed her, and forbore to press the point. "How can she feel such affection for that bilious, insensible bookworm?" he thought, and reflected that he should not be ungrateful were the old Positivist called upon at once to enter into the state of glorious annihilation; but he said gently:

"Sweetest, if your heart is so full of love towards your father to whom you owe so little, how will it overflow towards your husband, whose only desire will be to devote his life to you! To-morrow," he added, "I will ride over with you and settle matters with Dr. Rolt."

"No, no," cried Ginevra; "I must tell Daddy myself. I will go alone to-morrow."

"As you please. But I may come up on the next day?"

Ginevra nodded.

"And you will start early; and you will not let Mr. Medlicott come with you; and I will walk down to the slip-rails and meet you."

"After all," remarked Gilmore complacently, "your father cannot reasonably object to me; and if," he added magnanimously, "you dislike so much the idea of being separated from him, we will ask him to come to England and live with us."

Thus he airily dispersed Ginevra's difficulties, and went on to paint in glowing language the pleasures of European life,

the beauties of Italian cities, Swiss mountains, Rhenish castles, and all the thousand and one wonders to which he would introduce his bride.

"Does it not need a great deal of money to travel about and to live in England?" asked Ginevra in a tone of satisfaction. "Perhaps you don't know, Brian, that by-and-by I shall be a rich woman. Daddy told me so when we came back from Leichardt's Town."

"Yes; I knew it," answered Gilmore, not without a faint twinge of self-dissatisfaction as he remembered his conversation with Mr. Medlicott at Mrs. Bonamorris's boarding-house. "I wish that you were a beggar, Ginevra, and that I could take you to my heart, knowing that I had gained nothing but the priceless treasure of your love. But," he added less seriously, "perhaps it is best as it is. You have been accustomed to a wild free life, untrammelled by any material consideration. English restraints would gall you: money is needed there to clear the social atmosphere. You might not be happy with a moderate income and a rickety Elizabethan mansion."

"I would be content to live in a garret with you; nevertheless, I am glad that I shall not come to you empty-handed," said Ginevra, with a little air of pride.

The day was waning and the shadows lengthening on the plain. The mountains were purple and gold, and the tall dead gum-trees, entwined with flowering cactus, rose clear against a mellow sky. Life seemed to have returned again to the station. The cracking of stock-whips sounded from the river-banks, and the lowing of milkers as the black boys drove them up towards the yard. There was the clang of a bell. The lovers started from their retreat as the station hands filed past from the huts to receive their weekly rations.

"We must go," said Ginevra, laughing and blushing. "Brian, did they see? What will they think?" as a black girl halted before them, and grinned, showing her white teeth, and slapped her sides, and waved her empty pipe.

"Budgery fellow, Benjamin, that belong to white Mary," cried the swarthy creature, and a peal of merriment echoed among the hills.

"Oh Brian, come," said Ginevra. "Don't hold my hand. It will soon be dressing-time. And look at the shower of gum-flowers which has fallen on my hair; and I am like

Nebuchadnezzar who fed upon the herbs of the fields, for I have eaten all the grass around me. . . ."

* * * * * * *

Ginevra could not sleep. She fancied that it was because she was so happy; and yet, sadness blended with her joy. She lay awake, broad-eyed. The window was wide open, and the night perfumes, heavy-scented datura mingling with the odour of spring roses and Cape jessamine, stole in from the starlit solitude of the garden. She had not the consolation of feeling that Brian too kept vigil; a spiritual but impenetrable barrier seemed to have reared itself between them, and their souls held no sweet commerce to-night.

Ginevra's bosom heaved with vague excitement which alternated with dread. It seemed to her that this new condition of being resembled the misty night without, full of strange sweetness, but with an element also of the unknown and terrible. She was like a child, who during the darkness which precedes the magic-lantern show, longs to clutch its mother's hand for reassurance in its wondering terror.

A craving for sympathy possessed her. She would have prayed had she known how, but for her prayers had little or no meaning; and the name of God was but a symbol for the Great Infinité into which by-and-by her paltry being should be merged. That night, she had said "Our Father," which Nancy Gryce had taught her long ago, and to which she clung from force of habit, or from the instinctive longing to address Some one, or Something. Sometimes she had a glimmering notion that there *might* be a God, and that there *might* be a Heaven; but it appeared irrational to concern herself deeply about a Being who, according to her father's creed, existed only in the minds of the superstitious, or to speculate upon a future life which to his views was utterly problematical.

Her spirit was heavy with loneliness. How solitary her childhood had been! She was sorry for her own forelornness. For her, there had been no tender kisses, no playful rebukes, no sympathetic training or loving fellowship of girlhood and motherhood. She wondered dimly now if nothing remained of her dead mother but dust; if there were not indeed, a land of shades where hereafter they might know each other.

Sweet Ginevra! with the child's vision and the woman's

heart, groping in the darkness, knowing not what joy or terror it might shroud!

At last she fell asleep. In her dreams she fancied that the spirit of her mother hovered over her. She beheld with almost the distinctness of waking vision a face, which had sad lips, dark eyes, and arched brows—a face that she knew. Then gradually the features faded and changed. The soft eyes grew glassy and cruel; the mouth widened, the chin receded; the white neck elongated and writhed—and lo! a snake reared itself before her, and hissed in her ears.

Ginevra awoke shuddering, and cold with the dew of fear. "*Mother! Mother!*" she shrieked aloud to the night.

All was quiet in the room. The air struck deadly chill; and the shadows seemed to move in that ghostlike twilight which precedes dawn. Ginevra rose. She lit her candle and searched the room. There was no trace of unwelcome visitant, and she laid herself down again, to toss restlessly upon her pillow till morning.

A GHOST OF THE PAST.

EARLY upon the following day, a woman was walking across the Birrali plain, along the rough track which led from the mining town of Yerangil to Dr. Rolt's Selection.

The sky was overcast and a drizzling rain was falling. Vapour shrouded the mountains; the blady grass bent, battered and moisture-laden, and not a bird or butterfly hovered over the dripping foliage of the scrub close by.

All joyousness seemed to have vanished from the landscape, which was more in harmony with the painful broodings of an unhappy woman that the ecstasies of a love-stricken girl.

The walker, dressed in a neat waterproof and small felt hat, was the lady who had crossed with Ginevra in the ferry-boat, and who had watched the departure of father and daughter from Mrs. Bonamorris's boarding-house. She looked older now than then. In her appearance there was no trace of adventitious aid to beauty; and the coquettish adjuncts of dress, that had given her a foreign and fashionable air, had

been discarded, or were not visible beneath her cloak. Yet, though pale and haggard, her regular features and dark eyes rendered her face strikingly handsome, and if about her mouth there was a forced world-worn expression, it had only the effect of increasing her power of awakening interest.

She had, the day before, travelled by coach from the railway terminus to Yerangil; there, she had stayed the night; and this morning, after having received from the innkeepers information about the road, she had set off alone to walk the four miles which divided the township from Dr. Rolt's Selection.

Her skirt was kilted high; her boots were thick, and in spite of the rain she trudged bravely on. After a little while, she came in sight of the house, a cottage with wide verandah almost covered by creepers, that, perched on the side of a hill, and closed in behind by dense forest, looked lonely enough to be the refuge of a modern Timon.

Now the drip, drip, ceased suddenly; the clouds parted, and a broad gleam of sunshine shone upon a crag of grey rock, scarred and fissured as by an earthquake, that overshadowed the dwelling. In front was a garden sloping towards the plain; on one side a little cluster of outhouses, and on the other a ragged field of lucerne and Indian corn, among which some bleached gum-trees reared themselves like skeletons. A green-fringed creek wound through the home paddock, deserted save by a few quiet kine; and a rocky gully—its stream now making a noise like a miniature cascade—emptied itself into a water-hole at the foot of the hill.

"No one else would have chosen a desolate spot like this in which to wear away his life," murmured the stranger.

She crept underneath the slip-rails and walked slowly up beside the garden fence, pausing every now and then to glance round her, or to look cautiously through the branches of the orange-trees, as though perchance the person she sought might unawares be near her.

But neither paddock, garden, nor house above showed any sign of occupation. Not a sound of any voice was to be heard; there was not even a dog lying on the verandah. Then she remembered that nearly all Australian stations are approached in the rear, and reflected that the back yard was probably the scene of any life there might be in the abode.

Now she came upon a little gate almost hidden by the passion-flower creepers with which it was covered.

She opened it softly, and entered the cultivated enclosure. Skirting a grove of orange-trees, she halted under the shelter of a side verandah, the windows opening on which, were closed. She stepped forward and inspected the building. All the doors were shut except one in the centre, which stood wide open to the verandah. This she guessed must belong to the sitting-room.

She took off her damp waterproof and gloves, wiped her shoes, and examined her trim black gown which was quite unharmed by the rain. Every article of her attire was singularly neat, and dainty even to fineness. Then she drew from her pocket a small hand-glass, smoothed her hair and arranged her collar. In these actions there was no coquettish *arrière pensée.* Her air was that of one completely pre-occupied, and even while she held the glass, her eyes wandered away, noting every detail of the place. She seemed a woman who had some absorbing object in view, in which her good looks might possibly assist her, and who was determined to neglect no small point of vantage.

Presently she walked cautiously along the verandah, and peered in at the open door; then she took courage and stepped across the threshold.

Dr. Rolt was alone in the room. He was writing at a table facing the light, apparently engrossed in his work. Behind him stood shelves filled with books, and on the table before him were more volumes, loose sheets of manuscript, instruments of various kinds, a microscope, and some specimen reptiles in bottles.

He lifted his head, and in an abstracted manner began to search among the litter of papers for something of which he was in want. "Great Heavens!" thought the stranger, "how haggard and old he has grown." Suddenly he became aware of the figure intervening between himself and the light, and without lifting his eyes spoke in the tone of one whose thoughts were absorbed in other subjects.

"Ginevra! Is that you? You have come back earlier than I expected."

For answer, the woman moved rapidly across the room and cast herself upon the ground at his feet. She laid her hand upon the arm of his chair, and raised to his her beautiful,

face, now tremulous and anguish-stricken. "David," she cried, "it is I. Do not be cruel to me. Oh, do not send me away!"

The shock of her sudden appearance seemed to deprive Dr. Rolt of the power of both breath and speech. He started violently, and gave a little gasp. The pen dropped from his hand; an ashen hue overspread his face; he leaned back in his chair, and for some moments silently regarded her.

"My God!" she ejaculated, "how ill you look."

"I—I *am* ill," he gasped; "I have not long to live; sudden agitation might kill me at any moment. Recollect this. Tell me calmly, if possible, why you are here, and I beseech you spare me as far as you are able."

He moved slightly and pointed to a seat opposite his own.

She rose from the ground and stood before him, erect, her hands resting upon the table. The passion which her gesture conveyed seemed to have returned to its source. She watched him with an expression of wondering pity, mingled with dread. She had expected to meet a stern judge, who might perhaps bid her harshly begone from his presence. Instead, she faced a frail old man, apparently tottering upon the verge of the grave, in whom it was pitiful to see the struggling resolution which sought to subdue an uncontrollable agitation.

"Does it hurt you to see me? I had fancied that after all these years I could have no power to inflict pain upon *you*."

The old man silently shook his head. She still looked at him in awed surprise.

"I—would not have come upon you so suddenly—if I had known," she said in a broken way.

"What do you wish with me?" asked Dr. Rolt sternly: he had mastered himself now. "Is it not sufficient," he went on, "that you should have cursed the past, without seeking to embitter the remnant of life left me? I had hoped that our old wrongs and differences were buried. What is your object in raking up the ashes? I had hoped to die without again seeing your face. Why have you come here to trouble me? How did you learn where I lived?"

"I am here because I am a mother. Nature gives rights which cannot be forfeited." She spoke very low, but at the last word her voice broke. She hurried on regardless of her words—regardless, as it were, of the impression she might be

creating. "You do not know that I have seen my darling. It is only a week ago. I sat beside her in the ferry-boat at Leichardt's Town. I watched her face, and something within me leaped into life, and I knew that she was my own—my eldest-born—of my bone, and of my flesh. . . . And then I saw and recognized you, changed as you are. I asked your name and your abode, and I have come. . . . For four days I fought with this instinct. I wished to keep away—I tried to hold myself back; but I could not—I could not. . . . And now that I am here can you condemn me? If I had been wholly a wicked woman would my heart have yearned towards Ginevra as it has yearned during these years, even when I have forced myself to think of her as a dead baby—lost to me for ever. Oh we women!—we may love—we may cut ourselves adrift from the closest ties; but we cannot escape the penalties of maternity. . . . And then to know that she was living, and that she was near me—should I have been human if I had refrained? I am going back to England immediately. Soon thousands of miles will divide us; and I said, 'If I might but see her face again, if I might but touch her hand—drink in the music of her voice. . . .' And though I knew that afterwards the despair and the misery would be greater; and though I struggled against my longing, it was tenfold stronger than I. . . . My love dragged at my heart-strings, and led me on. I was hungry after my child."

"Yet your love was not powerful enough to prevent you from deserting her—a helpless infant dependent on your care. By your own act you placed a gulf between you which neither you nor she may ever cross."

"I *meant* to come back, David—even after I . . . I would have come back; I would have deceived you for her sake; but—I was torn in two ways—and then it was too late. . . . And all through the nights during the long years I heard the sound of her voice calling—I felt the touch of her tiny arms. Even though other voices drowned hers for a little while, it came back again—always the same tones, saying, 'Mammy, Mammy.' And when I saw her in the boat, and realized that my little one—my baby—was grown a woman—as old as I when I married you. . . . Oh, let me see her, only for five minutes, if you will grant no more. It is not much for me to ask, I who am her mother—nothing that I have done can alter that. . . . I would not say one word that might lead

her to suspect the truth; I would only hold her hand; look in her face; kiss her garment, if you would suffer no closer embrace. . . . David," cried the poor woman in a tone of sharp entreaty, "does she know—what I am?"

"She believes—as every one does who has inquired upon the subject—that her mother is dead; and would that it were so! Oh! how much better it would have been if you had died in India when you were so ill, than that you should be living now—a disgrace—a reproach to yourself—and others."

Dr. Rolt was himself startled by the strangeness of his voice. It sounded cold and distant, as though he had been speaking in a dream.

"Yes," answered Clémence in an abstracted manner. "It would have been far better if I had died."

She sank upon the chair beside her, and leaning her elbows upon the table, covered her face with her hands, while, as if all power of restraint had left her, she sobbed: "Oh, I wish that I had died! Oh, I wish that I had died!"

"I am glad that you feel remorse. At least it may save you from sinking further—if you have not already touched the lowest deep. It is terrible to think of the wreck you have made of your life. I say nothing of my own wrongs—but how you have wronged yourself! Were you mad? Could you not have foretold this ending? If you were unhappy as my wife, are you not ten thousand times more wretched now?"

Stung by his tone of condemnation, Clémence lifted her head, and her eyes flashed through the streaming tears. "Good Heavens!" she cried. "What should a man like you know of happiness or misery? You were cold and self-contained in the old days: you are so still. Were yours the only wrongs? I used sometimes to wonder desperately within myself, whether if I struck you, it would rouse you from absorption in your books. Do you not remember how, when I made you listen to my tale of dulness and heartsickness, you sneered at me for being womanish; you upbraided me for discontent. Then you would go away upon your business or to your study, caring nothing that my life was being fretted with dreariness, and my heart gnawed by the craving for love. Love!—that was what I needed, and what you never gave me."

"Clémence," said Dr. Rolt, in an agitated manner which was almost self-exculpatory, "you make a great mistake. I did love you. I may not perhaps have understood you. Being so much older, I could not enter into your interests, which seemed frivolous compared with mine. It was a misfortune that we married; but I cared for you more deeply than you suppose. If I had known what was amiss with you, I would have tried to remedy it."

"If you had known! Oh yes, that is the way with men. You buy a toy because it pleases your fancy: you misuse it; it is broken, and you howl at the poor thing because it was frail. You dress up a lamb for sacrifice, and you are shocked at the blood which is spilt. What is a girl of sixteen but a toy, not fit for rough hands? What is her marriage but a sacrifice? . . . You tell her of joy surpassing her dreams, and are angry with her when she grieves at being tricked with a sham, and call her vile when another tempts her by a glimpse of the passionate bliss *you* should have revealed to her. . . . Had *I* no wrongs—no temptations? Did you not marry a child, and expect her in a year to become a woman as spiritless as if she had been fifty? Were you not harsh to me when I cried for sympathy, and distant and unforgiving when I vexed you? If you had really loved me, would you not have made every other consideration secondary to my illness? Would you not have come with me to England and allowed me to have my child? . . . Oh, what good can be gained by looking back upon those wretched years? I have come here neither to reproach you nor to play the part of repentant Magdalen. I want to see my daughter. Will you not let me see my daughter?"

"It is impossible," replied Dr. Rolt. "She is away from home."

"But she will soon be here," cried Clémence, snatching at his qualified denial. "I know that she is coming back to-day. Let me wait. Let me watch for her. You are very pitiless; but you are not so inhuman as to refuse this request to a *mother*."

He seemed to consider for a moment before answering, then said slowly: "I must let you think me inhuman, for I cannot grant what you ask."

"I would promise not to speak to her," pleaded Clémence. "And I would never force myself again into her presence as long as I live."

"Your self-control would break down. I beseech you, do not urge me. To be hard is in this case to be kind. Indeed, it is of no use persisting; my mind is made up; I cannot allow you either to speak to Ginevra or to see her."

Clémence rose as if to leave him. The look of despairing resolve upon her face touched while it vaguely alarmed Dr. Rolt.

"Clémence," he said, stretching forth his hand as though he would have detained her, "do me the justice to believe that I am not cruel and unforgiving. The past is like a dream to me, and I am too near the grave to feel resentment. But what is done cannot be undone; and nature avenges herself by her own hands. It is not to be supposed that you should be without some mother-like yearning towards your child; but try to convince yourself that the truest way in which you can prove your love is by stifling it, and by endeavouring to look upon Ginevra as one whom your own act has made dead to you. Of what gain would it be to you to see her? It would only be a deepening of your remorse. And she has a vivid imagination. Already it has been exercised in conjectures upon her mother's fate. An unguarded word, a look, a cry might rouse suspicion in her mind, and she would never rest till she had learned the truth. And then, what misfortune!—what degradation! Clémence, you cannot wish to run any risk of this."

She sat down again, and began rocking herself backwards and forwards, while sobs shook her frame, and the heavy tears trickled through her fingers.. "I will go, I will go, since it is best for her. She shall never know that I have been here. . . . I have been told that there are Races at Birrali; I can guess that she is there. And you have said that she is coming back to-day. . . . You cannot prevent me from lying in wait behind the bushes to watch her as she passes by."

"I cannot; and I would not wish to do so, if you will give me your promise not to try and detain her. Do this, and I will trust you."

"Yes, yes, I promise. Tell me by which way she will come."

Dr. Rolt walked to the window, and pointed to a winding road leading over the ranges. Then when he returned to his chair, there fell a silence between them. Haggard and

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exhausted-looking, he leaned back breathing quickly, while she sat quite still, her eyes fixed blankly upon the hills, across which she knew that her daughter would ride. At last she said in a dull way:

"I had better go. There need be nothing more now between us."

"Clémence," said Dr. Rolt, with deep emotion, "my heart bleeds for you. Will you not believe this, or do you still think me utterly cold? Perhaps you are right. I did you a wrong in marrying you before you were old enough to understand yourself; and I expected too much from you. I also have suffered deeply, and have known remorse. I would help you if I could. I have tried to help you."

"How?" she asked in a startled manner.

He paused, then answered evasively, influenced by the fear that she would reject his aid. "You will know by-and-by. I have not much longer to live, and I should like you to receive the intimation of my death. Will you give me your address?"

She looked at him keenly and wonderingly, and seemed to reflect for a moment. "And what, in the case of your death, will become of Ginevra?" she asked abruptly.

"She will be well cared for; better than she is here, under my protection. A friend of mine, a kind honourable man, will take her to live with him."

"Will you tell me who he is?"

"I would rather not do so."

Clémence drew towards her a slip of paper, and wrote rapidly:

MADAME C. DESSOLLES,
Care of Messrs. Grey and Prentiss,
15, Ovingdean Street,
Strand,
London.

Then handed it to him without a word.

He read it and laid it beneath a paper-weight upon the table beside him.

"Where are you going, Clémence, when you leave here?" he inquired tremulously.

"I am going first to Yerangil, then to Leichardt's Town, and afterwards I shall take the first steamer to England."

"Are you—are you alone?"

She shuddered involuntarily. "Yes—except for my little girl."

"There is a child then?"

"There are two."

"And he—the man for whom you left me?"

"He separated from me five years ago."

"What brought you to Australia?"

"I hated myself. I was afraid—afraid of becoming more wicked. I had heard that he was here, and I was half mad. I thought that if I were to see him—but why do you make me tell you this?"

"You have not met him then?"

"No."

"And you have sunk—lower."

"No, no; not that. But I have sunk as low as a woman can sink and retain self-respect. Oh, cease questioning me! I cannot bear it."

"Only one thing more. How are you living now? Have you money? Will you accept from me what will support you honestly?"

"I am living what you might call a respectable life. Not because I am a penitent, but because I am weary of self-loathing. You can do nothing for me. I would rather take the wages of sin than money offered me in charity by you. Don't think that I am in want. He—behaved handsomely—as they say. He makes me a yearly allowance, and has placed his son at school. I am going back now that I may be near my boy."

Dr. Rolt half rose from his seat, and for the first time seemed moved by passion.

"What did you see in this man to induce you to sacrifice your child, your home, your good name? Who was he? Where did you meet him?"

"More questions? And of what use now? You might have known everything long ago if you had chosen to set me free; but that I was certain you would never do. No. The fire is burnt out; why, as you yourself said, rake up the ashes? *You* never understood the temptation of love. . . . David, I am going now. Good-bye. . . . Good-bye," she repeated, pausing for an instant in the open doorway. "We shall never meet again in this world: and you do not believe that there is another."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN AMBUSH.

THE shadow had lightened. Dr. Rolt was alone.

"Clémence!" he called faintly; but there was neither answer nor sign of her return.

"Of what avail?" he murmured. "Why should I wish to recall her?" He leaned wearily back in his chair. Again his face was overspread by the ashen hue it had assumed when first he had recognized his wife. He groaned aloud, and stooping forward buried his head in his hands. After a few moments they dropped nervelessly; his eyes were closed; his chin rested upon his breast. So, for half an hour or more, he remained, almost as though lost to consciousness.

He was aroused by the entrance of Nancy Gryce, a gaunt, dogmatic-looking woman, who carried upon a white-covered tray his midday meal of soup and bread. She began to move the papers which lay scattered upon the table. Dr. Rolt stretched out his hand and laid it over the slip upon which Clémence had written. "It was not a dream then," he murmured.

"Master," said Nancy, "here's your dinner. Are you well? —you look so grey. Was there any one with you, sir, or were you talking just to yourself? I heard a voice, and said I, 'There's Miss Ginevra back again,' but I soon saw that there was nobody at the stock-yard or any sign of horses, and I remembered that Gryce said it would be afternoon before they left Birrali. Well, Joe Nash rode by this morning. Macbean has won the Cup—bad luck to him; and Joe said there was no one to beat Miss Ginevra at the Races, and she was dancing with a smart English gentleman all the night. His name was Colonel Gilmore."

Mrs. Gryce was the only person in the district who ventured to speak with perfect freedom to Dr. Rolt. "And I do it," she confided to her husband, "because his ways with Miss Ginevra is not such as I like, and so, when I get on a bit easier with him, I shall tell him." But after ten years' service this time has not yet arrived.

"Put the tray down, Nancy," said Dr. Rolt. "I need

nothing more. Don't disturb me till Miss Ginevra comes back. I want to be alone."

Mrs. Gryce obeyed, casting at him a dissatisfied look as she left the room. After a few minutes, he heard her voice outside rating a black boy for having allowed the supply of wood to run scarce. The kitchen was divided from the house by a covered way, and the parlour door usually stood open, so that Dr. Rolt's gong might be easily heard. But it was Nancy's baking afternoon, and the oven would not heat rightly, and the fresh wood was green and damp. Nancy's temper was bad, and soon she fretted herself into such absorption in her occupation that she ceased to think of her master.

The old man mechanically swallowed a spoonful of soup, then pushed the tray away. He was trembing and unnerved. It seemed as though the wall of abstract interests which had closed in his life had suddenly crumbled away, and that he stood in the outside world face to face with a spectre of time gone by. He got up, paced the room for a minute or two, and shook himself, as if by so doing he might dissipate the effects of that tragic interview, then sat down to his work, and braced himself resolutely to forget the fact of Clémence's visit.

But there, in the doorway, she stood again; and there against the bookshelf, and here now by his side. Her eyes, wild and despairing, seemed to haunt the room; her voice with its intensity of pathos rang in his ears. His whole being had been unhinged; it was impossible to take up his former cynical personality. He began to read, but the words conveyed no meaning to his intelligence. With an immense effort of will, he endeavoured to concentrate his thoughts upon the work which had occupied him. To no purpose. . . . Then one by one, as though printed in letters of fire, the wild words of reproach which she had addressed to him, stood out and burned into his brain. "Oh love! love!" he cried. "Is nothing in the world to count as gain but love! If there be power in a curse—let him for whom she deserted me be accursed. May his children live and die in want and misery! May his wife, if ever he take an innocent woman to his breast, be the sacrifice for his guilt! May his days be poisoned with remorse, his nights bitter with despair! May he suffer tenfold the pain which he has made others to suffer! . . ."

Then suddenly came the feeling of painful constriction—of horrible suffocation. He stretched forth his hand to the gong and pressed it violently—without effect. Nancy Gryce, intent upon her work, did not hear the summons. Would she never come? All the time he retained his consciousness. It might be a passing seizure such as had come and gone before. . . . But no; momentarily the pain grew more intolerable. He tried to call, but voice failed. Darkness closed over him, and still through the darkness he could hear the murmur of sounds without.

The agony deepened, and then was gone, leaving numbness and strange blankness, and still that horrible darkness. Was this Death? No; not yet. Thought was moving. Then, like the breaking of a spring, followed the wrench of spirit from flesh, and a confused sense of floating upon illimitable waves of space. . . .

* * * * * *

Clémence Dessolles took up her cloak and set forth again with faltering steps and failing heart. From the time that she had left Leichardt's Town till her interview with her husband, she had been buoyed up by excitement, expectation, and wild impulse. Now she felt nothing but blank despair. She walked down the garden-path, and as she passed between the orange-trees stooped to pick up something lying colourless and wet upon the ground; it was only a breast-knot that might have been worn by Ginevra. She gathered a sodden rose from a bush as she went by, and at the wicket-gate turned to take one last look at the Cottage—a look by which she sought to fix the picture for ever upon her memory.

The day had brightened. It had now ceased raining, and the sun shone fitfully through driving clouds. Clémence followed the road that had been pointed out to her by Dr. Rolt, and when at the distance of about a mile from the house, she came upon some fencers at work, asked them whether it led to Birrali.

The men looked amazed when she accosted them, and eyed her from head to toe as though she had been an apparition. But one answered her civilly enough. "Yes. There was another short cut, and if the lady wanted to meet anybody riding over from Birrali Station, she need not be afraid of missing her way. About two miles further on, there was a track branching off down the range and leading to Yerangil,

but that was all, barring cattle-tracks, and 'twas only Mr. Medlicott's scrubbers that made them. It was a rough road, and if she were alone and particularly wished to push on that day, why didn't she go back to the Selection and get on the blind side of Nancy Gryce, who would lend her a nag; and a black boy from the camp would show her the way, for the price of a fig of tobacco."

Clémence shook her head and passed on. Her practical mind had taken note of the directions, and formed its plans. She would go a little further, would lie in wait till her daughter had ridden by; then she would follow the Yerangil road, and thence her way was easy.

She was at that stage of emotion, when the inner consciousness seems deadened, and external sights and sounds are preternaturally distinct. Years afterwards she could have painted almost line by line the face of the man who directed her—could have described accurately each gully that she crossed, each stony rise that she surmounted. It *was* a rough road. She was a delicate woman unused to these wild solitudes, and she was weak and faint for lack of food. In her reticule there was a flask of wine and some bread. She ate and drank, and went on her way strengthened.

She was in a gorge. The hills rose steep on each side of her. Fallen logs and great boulders of rock overgrown with the crimson Kennedia and blue indigo plants, encroached on the pathway. Giant gum-trees hemmed her in. No sound broke the stillness save that of her own footfall, the occasional hoarse laugh of a jackass, or the rustle of a dingo or wallabi making stealthily to its lair.

After a time she reached a narrow valley, running transversely between high ranges, strewn with the *débris* that had been washed down from the mountains, with natural cairns of greystone, and here and there a pillar-like rock. Close by the roadside was a pool bordered by ferns, with an iridescent bloom upon its still surface. Beyond, a clear stream trickled over a bed of gravel, and widened beneath an overhanging rock into another deep pool where a natural bench, completely screened from observation, seemed hewn for the accommodation of the wayfarer.

Here Clémence sank down. In this hollow she would remain concealed till by-and-by she should hear the tramp of horses' feet; then she would rise, and cautiously peering

through a cranny in the rock, would meagrely satisfy her craving heart by one fleeting glance at her darling. And then she would go away as a mother might from the grave of her dead child.

It seemed a long time to wait. She sat perfectly still, too weary to think, listening to the babbling of the brook, counting her wild pulsations, watching the sunbeams dance and flicker upon the pool, and looking up at the gently swaying boughs of a wattle tree overhead that threw its scented pollen upon her lap.

She took off her hat, and leaned her head, heavy with its coils of hair, against the rock.

At last, when the afternoon was waning, she heard the regular click, click, tramp, tramp, of horses' feet down the stony hill opposite.

Clémence started in her hiding-place and stole a look. In front, old Gryce, leading at the length of a bridle-rein a heavily laden packhorse, jogged steadily on. A few yards behind, Ginevra followed, leaning back in her saddle with lightly held rein, her face unveiled, her eyes dreamy and sweet with a nameless joy, her child-like lips parted as she crooned the refrain of that weird ballad which she had sung to Gilmore on the river.

"Drink not! With fierce desire
Thy heart shall glow.
Drink not! For love is fire,
And love is woe."

But the wrapt expression upon Ginevra's face belied the warning words. "She loves," instinctively thought the mother.

Oh anguish! Why did she ride by so fast? Why would she bend over and pat her horse's neck? Why did the animal's pace quicken as it neared the foot of the hill?

Now Gryce had passed on, and Ginevra was opposite the concealing rock. Oh, would she look that way, thought the mother! Would she see the dark head and eager eyes which peered above the stone?

At sight of the running stream, Ginevra's horse, a handsome spirited-looking chestnut, tossed its head impatiently and swerved aside. There was a whinny—a halt—the girl spoke in low caressing tones.

"And are you thirsty, Coquette? And would you like to stop here where the water is cool? And shall we ride home alone—you and I—and think over what we have to tell Daddy? We have a great deal to tell, Coquette."

Then her voice rang out, echoing sweet through the glen: "Gryce, go on, and do not wait for me. Coquette wants to drink, and I'll catch you up in a canter along the Two Mile Flat."

Gryce was thirsty too, and, as he would have expressed it, "fashed." He thought of the fragrant cup of tea awaiting him in the kitchen, and of the new heifer that had to be milked that evening, and jogged contentedly forward, only jerking back his head to say: "And do 'ee be careful, Miss Ginevra, to hold her up; and don't 'ee let her get the bit outside of her teeth, for she is a cunning brute is that Coquette."

Ginevra loosed the reins, letting Coquette wade into the shallow pool, while she gathered some sprays of the wattle, and softly continued her song. Coquette drank her fill, lifting her head while the water streamed from her mouth, and champing her bit in lazy enjoyment of the draught. Now, being a fastidious animal, she must needs disdain the impurity which her own hoofs had created; the rivulet was narrow, and but a step would bring her lips to where the tender grass bowed to the current. "Coquette, Coquette," cried the young girl, "gently, little woman!"—down rained a shower of golden bloom. A branch imperiously seized snapped short. The screen of stone was passed; and Ginevra uttered a cry of surprise at finding herself face to face with a sad-featured, beautiful woman, who was deathly pale, and who crouched back against the rock, as though in mortal dread of discovery.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNKNOWN MOTHER.

THERE was a momentary pause of bewilderment and uncertainty; then Ginevra urged Coquette forward, and in an instant had dismounted, and was kneeling on the grass at the

stranger's feet, holding her hands and gazing anxiously into her face.

"Oh, tell me what is the matter!" she exclaimed imploringly. "Are you ill? Have I frightened you? What are you doing here? Perhaps you have had an accident?"

She glanced vaguely round for any trace of broken vehicle, horse, or companion, then in a puzzled manner at Clémence's walking gear. "This is not a driving road. Have you nobody with you?"

"I am alone," faltered Clémence, rising. "Do not be alarmed: nothing has happened. I have walked a long way, and had sat down to rest. I am going to Yerangil."

"Walked! You!—but why?" Instinctive courtesy checked Ginevra's expressions of astonishment, and she added—"This is not the right road; it is the short cut over to Birrali. If you want to go to Yerangil you must turn back and follow the track to the right, upon the top of that hill. But you have still some distance to go, and it is getting late. We don't live far from here. You must have passed the place—Dr. Rolt's Selection. Gryce has only just gone on ahead with the pack. I can cooëe for him, and he will put you on his horse; and you will come back with me and stay the night."

"I thank you," said Clémence, struggling bravely to speak with firmness. "You are very kind—too kind; but I—I cannot accept your hospitality."

"Now I am sure that you must be a new comer in the district," said Ginevra, naïvely, "or you would not talk of kindness and hospitality. Don't you know that in Australia no one would allow a stranger like you to pass his door without begging her to come in?"

"And you have been brought up in this creed of charity and goodwill, you would not turn even a sinner from your gates—or from your heart?"

"Nay," answered Ginevra, sweetly. "It is the sinner who most needs charity and love; and I have no creed. I am only a wild girl of the woods." She smiled softly as she spoke, for Brian had caressingly used the term when he had parted with her at the slip-rails that morning. "Will you not do as I ask?"

Clémence shook her head, and drew back with a convulsive shrinking. She dared not speak. All the mother love

within her was clamouring for issue. With difficulty could she refrain from pressing her child to her heart.

"I have seen you before," said Ginevra, fixing her clear eyes upon those hungering ones which failed before her gaze. "I was frightened, and feared that something dreadful had happened, or I should have felt certain of it at first. I saw you in Leichardt's Town—twice. The first time I looked in at your window at night. It was a rude thing to do. I startled you. The second time you crossed with me in the ferry-boat. You asked my name, and your little girl is called Ginevra. I remember her well. I have thought of you so many times since. . . . Coquette, Coquette!" The animal was tugging at her bridle and impatiently snatching at the herbage near. Ginevra unbuckled the rein and fastened it round a sapling close by, then turned again to Clémence. "*Do* you know me?" she asked solemnly.

For the moment Clémence's face became crimson. She raised the girl's gloved hand, and kissed it passionately.

"There *is* a tie between us! I feel it *here*," said Ginevra, folding Clémence's hand above her heart. She drew closer, and continued in wistful, pathetic tones—"I had a conviction, even then, when you asked my name and looked at me so earnestly, that in one sense I was more to you than a passing stranger. There was something in your expression, in your manner, which caused me to know that you were interested in me, and made me fancy that perhaps I reminded you of some one whom you once loved. Tell me, am I right?"

"It is so," answered Clémence, lowering her face that Ginevra might not see her gathering tears. "You do remind me of one—whom I loved with all my heart, with all my soul." . . . Ginevra softly stroked her arm, and Clémence lifted her head, and gazed at Ginevra through her falling tears. "Child, let me look at you closely. I want to carry your image in my memory, so that night and day, dreaming and waking, I may see you even as I behold you now. You are very beautiful, and you are sweet and pure as an angel from Heaven; and your eyes are bright and clear—they have not wept much. Oh, I thank God that your childhood has been happy. I pray that your womanhood may be blessed." . . . She removed Ginevra's hat and gloves, lingering over these little actions; and smoothed her hair, and touched caressingly her cheeks, shoulders, hands; while all

the time her own eyes were fastened upon those of the young girl, which in sympathy had become misty too. Then suddenly, as though seized by an ungovernable impulse, Clémence snatched Ginevra to her bosom and held her there pressed closely, and murmured broken words of endearment—"My darling! My sweet love! My dear Angel! . . . Oh, why must I leave you? why must I never see you more?"

When the outburst was over, and she had released Ginevra from this wild embrace, Clémence drew back, and covered her face, while her frame shook with sobs.

"I have broken my promise," she said in a loud whisper. "Oh, what shall I do?—I have broken my promise."

Ginevra sat astonished, wide-eyed, gazing at her, held as it were by the spell of this inexplicable emotion, and in a mysterious way moved deeply also. Who shall say by what cords a mother's being is bound to that of her child?

"Oh, what do you mean?" she exclaimed at last. "Who are you? Why do you cry? It hurts me to see you so unhappy. What do you mean by saying that you must never see me again? Why not? If you care for me, nothing need keep us apart. Love is so sweet to me. If you will let me be your friend I will do all that I can to comfort you. Indeed, I love you dearly. From the first I was drawn towards you."

"Core of my heart," cried the mother, losing all power of self-control, and straining Ginevra again in her arms. "You love me! oh, say that once more!"

"It is strange, for I do not know you, or you me," said Ginevra, dreamily, "but indeed I love you. Why should it give you so much pleasure to hear me say this? And why do you kiss me so tenderly, and sob as though your heart would break? What have I done to trouble you? I have thought of you so often since that day in the boat; I have hoped that I might see you again, if only because you are so beautiful. . . . And now to meet you here, so unexpectedly! It is as though fate had led us both to this spot."

"Yes," answered Clémence, bitterly. "God is more merciful than man. He has brought us together."

"Come back with me," pleaded Ginevra. "Daddy is always kind to travellers. He would be glad that you should pass the night with us. And we will talk late—and I will try to make you less unhappy. If it does not pain you too much, you will tell me about this person whom I am like. I

have very few women friends, indeed, none except Mrs. Medlicott. Be my friend. You are lonely, I think; and so sometimes am I too. Come and sleep with us to-night; you shall share my room. You must be tired, and Yerangil is a long way off."

"My darling," said Clémence earnestly, "it is said that sweetness and purity bring their own reward. May your tender impulses rise up to Heaven and descend like dew upon the path you tread, causing the flowers of love to spring up where your steps have been. May the Holy Mother, who has a human heart, whisper to you in your dreams of the balm which you have plenteously poured into the bosom of one bereaved and desolate. . . . No, I cannot return with you. I must go on my lonely way, and that will lead me far from you. We may never meet again. In a few moments we must part. But oh, my Ginevra, believe that through all my life I shall be the better and the happier for having held you in my arms—for having heard you say that you love me. . . . And I love *you* as if"—in a passionate whisper—"as if you were my very own child—my precious little one. . . . And now we must bid each other farewell, my dearest, and this meeting must be a secret known only to ourselves. You must not tell your father that you have seen and talked to me to-day."

"Why?" asked Ginevra more and more bewildered.

"He would say. . . . He would be angry," said Clémence hesitatingly. "No," she exclaimed abruptly, "I will not teach you to deceive. Be truthful, honest always, as your eyes tell me that you are. Reply to any question which your father may ask you. His anger is nothing to me," she added, with resentful emphasis.

"Why should you fear him? He is never angry—silent often—sad often, but rarely impatient. And if he were angry, what cause should he have for being vexed with you?"

"He—oh, I cannot tell you," wildly answered the poor woman; then in reply to her daughter's steadfast eye-questioning—"He knows something of my life, and he does not think well of me. He would never forgive me for having spoken to you. He would tell you that I was wicked. He would make you hate me."

"That would be impossible," said Ginevra. "I could not hate a person who loved me, even if she were wicked; and

I do not believe that you could do anything wrong. You are too gentle, too kind. *Tell me who you are.*" She seized Clémence's hand, almost hurting it in her vehemence. "*Tell me why you called your little girl Ginevra.*"

Clémence tottered to her feet, and with one arm drew Ginevra to her so as to avoid the inquiry in those penetrating eyes. But Ginevra reared her head back, insisting upon an answer.

"Am I, as well as your child, named after some one whom you knew well, who was perhaps related to you?"

"You are both named after my mother," said Clémence faintly.

"Then I know that there is a link between us—a blood tie—oh, say whether it is so." Ginevra's voice thrilled with eagerness. Clémence shook her head in dumb agony. "You will not speak. Why are you so reserved? You are cruel. Ah, if you knew how I have longed for a woman friend of my own kin! Except my father, I have no one in the world."

"They have neglected you," cried Clémence fiercely. "You have been lonely; you feel the need of love."

"No—no," answered Ginevra, and a divine blush overspread her face. "I am loved. I am happy. Every one is good to me. But you do not understand. I have never known my mother."

Clémence shuddered at the unconsciously dealt stab, and loosed her arms from about her child.

"I have never known my mother," repeated Ginevra dreamily. "She died when I was almost a baby. But I picture her as she must have been—so pure, so good, so loving; and it makes me sad to think of the happiness which might have been mine if she had lived."

"Oh, my God!" groaned Clémence. "This is bitter punishment."

Her ejaculation was drowned by a shrill cry echoing among the hills.

"Coo—ëe."

Clémence shrank back into the shadow of the rock.

"It is Gryce," said Ginevra. "He has come back to look for me."

"And we must part," said Clémence, in tones of anguish—"never to meet again."

"Why? why?" cried Ginevra, her voice shrill with entreaty. "Answer me this question. I know nothing of my mother's family, and it is possible—— Tell me—are you her sister?"

Clémence shook her head.

"Then *who* are you? At least let me know your name."

"I am called Clémence Dessolles," said Clémence boldly. She had a desperate desire to see if any responsive echoes awakened in Ginevra's memory; but there was only a look of blankness, and then the Coo—ëe sounded again, this time closer and more sharply.

The girl lifted her voice in an answering call.

"Ginevra," hoarsely whispered Clémence, "put your arms round my neck and kiss me of your own accord; and, darling, I have a fancy—a foolish fancy, but indulge it. Let me hear you once say *mother*."

Ginevra kissed her in a lingering embrace, but, strange irony of Circumstance, she would not obey the last request.

"You will think it perhaps unreasonable," she said hesitatingly, "but though my mother died so long ago, she seems sometimes like a living person to me, and I could not call any one else by her name."

Clémence wept silently. Her tears moistened Ginevra's cheek. There was one long close kiss, and the arms loosened, and mother and daughter separated. Ginevra unfastened Coquette's bridle, and poising herself upon a stone, leaped into her saddle. She bent one last wistful look upon the wanderer.

"I cannot bear to leave you so. Oh, *do* come back with me. Must you go? Where are you going?"

"No, no; I must reach Yerangil before the coach starts for Leichardt's Town to-night. In less than a week's time I shall be on my way to England. Do not wait longer, I cannot bear it. Farewell."

She shrank again under the shadow of the rock, and Ginevra's longing eyes saw her no more.

"Why, Miss Ginevra," discontentedly said Gryce, who had stopped half-way down the hill. "Coquette has had time to drink the creek dry. What could ha' kept you. I thought you wur never a-coming. And I declare, Miss Ginevra, you've been crying. Did hur get the bit out arter all? and have you hurt yourself?"

"No, Gryce," answered Ginevra submissively. "Let us push on home as quickly as we can." But before they reached the slip-rails a black boy galloped frantically down the ridge and paused a little distance off, making mysterious signs to Gryce, who hurried on to join him.

"Ole massa go bong along a humpey," whispered the boy, whom Nancy had warned not to speak abruptly before Ginevra; but, indeed, the poor child was thinking too deeply of the interview with Madame Dessolles, wondering upon the mystery which seemed to envelope that lady, and how or whether she should keep the silence which had been vaguely enjoined upon her, to pay much heed to the black boy's gesticulations.

"Me go fetch Missa Medlicott, and that fellow medicine man from Yerangil," said the native, and darted off again before Gryce could ask further questions. The old man spurred his horse and dashed into the yard. A group of excited gins were howling at the kitchen door, and Nancy herself sat on the steps, pale and too unnerved to rebuke them.

"Hold up, old woman; for God's sake hold up," cried Gryce, shaking her into a standing posture. "Is it true? what has happened to the master? Speak low; Miss Ginevra is behind."

But Ginevra, who had cantered quickly up the hill, had already caught the burden of the black's wail, "Ole massa go bong," and jumped from her horse, knowing the ghastly truth.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SLIP OF PAPER.

THE doctor from Yerangil, and Mr. Medlicott from Birrali, rode over as speedily as they could to the Selection. Gilmore accompanied the latter, and thus was with Ginevra in the early hours of her sorrow.

They came after dark, and found her tearless, and impassive, alone in the room where her father had died. She had put away his books and papers as had been her custom—the sheet that was half written, the notes which would not be needed again

—all the paraphernalia of work that would never now be finished. She was strangely calm. The knowledge that all was over struck her with the shock of blank conviction, but conveyed no distinct image to her mind. To a child who has never seen death, it is almost impossible to realize that eternal stillness in which busy brains and active fingers may toil no more.

While with a vague wonder and half-conscious anguish Ginevra had pursued her task, she had come upon the slip of paper on which Madame Dessolles had written her name and address. This sudden discovery roused Ginevra to vivid comprehension, and for the first time since her return that afternoon, her thoughts flowed in regular sequence.

Quick as lightning, her mind grasped the facts of the situation. She felt certain that Clémence Dessolles had been with Dr. Rolt that very day, and that the agitation consequent upon her visit had been the immediate cause of his death. Ginevra knew that the Leichardt's Town physician had warned her father against incurring the risk of violent emotion. He had himself told his daughter so much, and had made light of the danger, scouting the possibility of any exciting occurrence in their quiet retreat. But Clémence's strange agitation and faltering admissions had set Ginevra's imagination to work, and she readily conjectured that Madame Dessolles might be connected with Dr. Rolt's past life in such a manner that her unlooked-for appearance had, in his weak state, been sufficient to produce tragic consequences.

It was only of late that Ginevra had speculated at all upon her father's coldness, self-absorption, and distaste for society. Woman-like, she had attributed these peculiarities to grief at the loss of her mother, and had taken pleasure in dwelling upon a fidelity which, to her romantic ideas, exalted the mourner. It now became evident to her that there was a living cause for the weight of care which had seemed to oppress him, and by the light of this knowledge she read more clearly the events of the day. Madame Dessolles's unexpected appearance, and lying in wait while she rode past, the woman's wild words and uncontrollable agitation, were all explained by the supposition of some hidden link binding her father and herself to this stranger. Oh, if she had but importuned further and learned the truth!

Strange as it may appear, there was no revolt from or

bitter indignation against Madame Dessolles in Ginevra's breast. Unconsciously to herself, her fatalistic theories prevented her from feeling wrath against one whom she considered a passive instrument in the hands of Destiny. She was awed by the consciousness of human experience with which her present bounded comprehension was utterly unable to cope. It seemed to her that she too had of late been borne along by a resistless tide. Her thoughts leaped back to the night, in reality so short a time ago, when she had walked with Gilmore, and had seen the vision of Clémence at the window. She had hardly a belief in God, poor child! and, like her father, might have scoffed at the notion of any Providential scheme of regulating the universe; but she had a superstitious faith in certain occult forces, moral and physical—in some spiritual law of gravitation, which might have the property of bringing human atoms into contact, and which upon that particular evening had set the wheels of her Fate in motion.

The strange possibilities of life pressed themselves imperiously upon her. Who was this woman by whom from the first her imagination had been so keenly influenced, who had embraced her, and wept over her, and had bidden her say the word "mother"? . . . Then Ginevra's heart stopped beating, and a lightning-like gleam of the truth flashed across her mind. Could it be that Madame Dessolles was in very truth her mother?

"*Mother!*" she repeated the word several times below her breath, reverently, slowly, passionately. She felt again Clémence's clinging arms—heard her broken words. "My little one! my sweet! my dear angel!" and that human instinct which is God-given and unerring told her that she had guessed correctly.

But if this were true, why had they been held apart? Why had she been brought up to believe herself motherless? Why had the power of intercourse been denied to this yearning love? Why Clémence's wild assertion that her husband would denounce her as sinful? What sin could lawfully separate a mother from one of her children? Was that other Ginevra then *her* sister? . . . What was sin?

The blood rose on Ginevra's cheeks and brow. Guileless, ignorant, as she was, she had read in her histories, it had been subtly conveyed to her understanding, that there was

one terrible shame to womanhood, which her virginal modesty bade her ignore, upon which, indeed—as upon love itself—she had looked as one of those mysteries of life, vague as the problematical heaven and hell.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy, won't you wake and tell me what it all means?" burst involuntarily from Ginevra's lips. The sound of her own voice brought anew the crushing sense of desolation, making her mind colourless again. After a little while, she mechanically took the slip of paper and placed it in her bosom, scarcely knowing why she did so, and yet with the feeling strong upon her that it behoved her to guard her mother's secret. Then came the tramp of horse's feet, and the arrival of her guardian and lover. Composure seemed almost a necessity. She maintained strict silence upon the subject of her discovery and suspicions to Colonel Gilmore and Mr. Medlicott, and when her father's body had been removed to another room, she sat motionless, passively resisting their entreaties that she would go to her chamber and try to sleep.

"It might not be true," she said, looking at her lover with piteous pleading eyes. "Daddy might wake, and I must be near."

At last Gilmore persuaded her to lie upon the sofa, and sat beside her, holding her hands and whispering words of love. The doctor came back from his examination, and conclusively stated to Mr. Medlicott, that the disease of the heart from which Dr. Rolt had suffered must have terminated fatally in such an attack as the last; then, after prescribing a sedative draught for Ginevra, and swallowing the cup of tea that Nancy Gryce had prepared, he rode back towards Yerangil.

Gilmore talked gently to Ginevra, making her understand by degrees the reality of her loss. His heart was full of tenderness for the young creature. The holiest feelings in his nature were aroused, and there was more of a woman's affection than of a man's passion in his manner of comforting his betrothed.

"Darling," he whispered, "I know how much you loved him, and my heart aches for you in your grief. But he was very ill. This must have happened before long, and if it has come suddenly upon you, you have the comfort of feeling that he himself knew his condition, and wished to spare you pain. Try not to dwell upon the present suffering: think of

the new life which we are to share. You shall never know the need of love. I will be father, mother, husband—all in one."

"Mother!" repeated Ginevra, and winced involuntarily as she spoke. She looked appealingly into Gilmore's face, which, full of anxious solicitude, was bent over hers. If she might only tell him what she had learned that afternoon. If he could but go to Yerangil and bring back Madame Dessolles! Words came rushing to her lips, and were checked by an instinct of maidenly reserve. Her love was yet too young to admit of such a confidence as this . . . and it was too late. Already the night coach would have left Yerangil. Was it fated then that Madame Dessolles should not know how Dr. Rolt had died? "I *must* find her, I *must* learn the truth," thought Ginevra, and remembered the slip of paper in her bosom. She was too bewildered to frame any distinct resolution, or even to trace out in her mind her own possible future, but this vague determination sustained her, and enabled her to command herself. "You see," she said to Gilmore in a tone of mournful reproach, "it is Daddy who has left me, not I who have forsaken him."

Soon a violent fit of weeping seized her. It lasted till morning broke, when, exhausted, she fell asleep with Brian's hand clasping hers.

While she lay in that troubled slumber, Gilmore sat beside her, his eyes fixed upon her face, not daring to move lest he should awake her.

They were alone, for Mr. Medlicott, tired out by his late exertions, had thrown himself upon a couch in the next room. The morning light, grey and ghostly, streamed in through the open window upon Ginevra's recumbent figure, to which her dark drapery clung closely. It touched the girl's pale cheeks and made the tears glisten upon her lashes. One arm was uplifted; the childlike mouth, which had yet so much latent strength in its curves, drooped piteously; the parted lips trembled as her breath came and went; her little fingers closed tightly round Brian's as she turned upon the pillow.

All the highest feelings of which his nature was capable stirred in Gilmore's breast while he watched by Ginevra's side. The barely furnished room seemed Paradise, the faint grey light glorious as the radiance of heaven. Freed by

contact with a spirit pure as that of the sleeping girl, his own had risen on wings towards the light for which it had yearned in vain.

He found himself musing on the fanciful myths and legends which taught how a soulless, earth-bound creature might, through union with one of a higher sphere, attain at last to immortal joy. The thought pleased him; but in its wake followed the torturing image of Dives' despair, which had often of late haunted him. His memory drifted backwards, and he shuddered, seized by an overwhelming sense of guilt and remorse.

"I have defrauded others; should not I also be defrauded? I have injured those who loved me; must I not suffer for the wrong which I have committed? I have deserted the helpless and innocent; is it not just that I also should be forsaken? Oh, God, snatch not the cup away from my lips. Grant me this hope of redemption, and I will atone, or, if it be my doom to bear punishment, let these better impulses and holier aspirations be the purgatorial torment through which I must pass in order to reach my heaven."

Such was Gilmore's unspoken petition.

Yet with this deep conviction of stain there mingled a faint element of satisfaction. He felt that he might still again bathe in the stream of youth and purity, and that thus his soul might be cleansed from blot and foulness. Unworthy though he might be, he had gathered the white lily, and he would wear it reverently.

Ginevra stirred, and a smile played about her lips. He knew that she was dreaming of him.

She would soon be his own—a part of his being. Though he shrank ashamed from the thought, there yet found entrance into his mind a faint feeling of satisfaction at the old man's death. Now there could be no conflicting claims. He would marry her at once, and take her home.

Home, to be the end and aim of that fair domestic life of which he had so often dreamed. He knew that in this vague longing had lain the root of his dissatisfaction with the world and with himself. A balm-like sensation of content stole over him as he gave himself up to intoxicating visions of the future. He saw Ginevra mistress of the quaint Elizabethan house which was now his, moving, still a free, fearless child of the forests, but in no incongruous fashion, through the

panelled rooms, and among the dusky shrubberies and close-clipped yews. He saw her against a golden autumnal background, and in the midst of spring flowers fresh and lovely as her own face. He saw her at the head of his table, and smiled in anticipation of the enthusiasm with which he knew that his old friends would welcome his bride. He saw her, slim and girlish, riding to the Meets, the delight of Master and Field. He saw her in London ball-rooms, courted, admired, yet indifferent to all worship save his own; and, fairest vision! he saw her with a rosy face pressed to his bosom and childish arms encircling his neck.

"Ginevra, Ginevra!" he murmured rapturously. "My lily! my beloved! my wife!" And it was in an ecstasy of happiness not unworthy of a young knight going forth in the name of God and for the love of his lady, that Gilmore bent down and kissed Ginevra's lips so softly that she hardly stirred in her sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

DR. ROLT'S WILL.

DAVID ROLT was buried, as he directed in a letter to his executors, upon a knoll which jutted out from the Birrali Crag, some thousand feet above the level—a desolate spot, overshadowed by a precipice, swept by the winds of the plain, and beaten upon by every storm which drenched the mountains.

Ginevra shuddered and wept when she visited the grave which he had chosen, and yet even she felt that no other would have been in harmony with his solitary life. The proud, reserved, yet restless spirit could not, she thought, have slept beneath the sod of a churchyard. In life the philosopher had disdained all sympathy save that of Nature; in death her tears only might water his grave.

When the will, which had been made as recently as the visit to Leichardt's Town, had been read, it was found that Dr. Rolt's property was even greater than had been supposed. A sum of six thousand pounds was left to Mr. Medlicott, to

be applied in accordance with the privately expressed wishes of the testator. The squatter also received a legacy of two thousand pounds, "as a mark of esteem and friendship;" and a bequest of one thousand pounds was made to Mrs. Medlicott. Nancy Gryce and her husband were pensioned, and various charities received more or less benefit; while the residue, amounting to something under sixty thousand pounds, was left under trust to Ginevra; who, it was stipulated, should reside with her guardian, Mr. Medlicott, till she attained her majority or married. It was further set forth, that in the event of her entertaining any matrimonial project before she was twenty-one, a period of one year must elapse between the formation of an engagement and its consummation in marriage; and that during the first six months of the probationary year the lovers must hold no intercourse, either verbally or by letter.

This proviso, the will in formal wording conveyed, "is insisted upon for the purpose of securing to my daughter Ginevra, as far as certain limitations will allow, liberty of action, freedom of choice, and opportunity for the effacing of hastily formed impressions.

Colonel Gilmore's hopes were dashed to the ground, and his plans entirely changed, by the above-quoted clause. His intention, silently formed in the hours immediately following Dr. Rolt's death, had been to postpone his return to England for a few weeks, and then to marry Ginevra and take her at once to his own home. This was now impossible. He must perforce tear himself from his future bride, and leave her in the care of the Medlicotts, who proposed sailing for England in three or four months. The prospect of parting was bitter, but it had its alleviations. Since separation was a necessity, it might be made compatible with duty and interest. His presence was required at home; it would be less tantalizing to know that an ocean divided him from his love, than to be within reach of her and yet debarred from meeting her. He mourned over the delay, but not from any doubt of Ginevra's constancy. In his mind there was a feverish dread of accident, but not of losing her love; of that he was too absolutely assured. Strange as it may seem, the forced diversion of his thoughts brought him a brighter mood, and partly dispelled his former gloomy fancies. And there was a comfortable positiveness and recognition of importance about the engage-

ment which placed it beyond all question. Mr. Medlicott was deeply interested in the marriage, and, indeed, flattered himself that the affair had been brought about chiefly through his instrumentality. The talk about settlements and realization of property, in which Ginevra's guardian indulged largely, was not as annoying to Gilmore as it might otherwise have been, for it conveyed an impression of certainty; and though his love soared high above all mercenary considerations, he was a man of the world, and appreciative of the advantages which would accrue to him through a well-dowered wife. He felt a certain pride in being able to announce to his relatives, who had at once condemned and commiserated him as extravagant, dissipated, and unfortunate, the happy prospect which now lay before him. On the other side, his new inheritance rendered his position unassailable, and acquitted him of interested motives. He was no longer a younger son, whose forestalled patrimony had been squandered partly in indulgence of his vices, partly in unsuccessful speculation, but a man of independent, if moderate, means, which justified him in aspiring to the hand of an heiress. He derived a manly satisfaction from the thought that his own house would be the home of his bride. It seemed to him, that his landing on English shores would be the first step in a new and prosperous career. He felt impatient to prove himself at once worthy of Ginevra's love and trust, and was ready to admit the force of Mr. Medlicott's arguments, all tending to urge his immediate departure.

"I am unfeignedly glad of that separation clause in Dr. Rolt's will," said the squatter. "It clears the road: otherwise I should have been obliged to insist upon something of the same kind, though I don't think I could have been so hard-hearted as to forbid correspondence. Never mind, the two voyages get over nearly four months, and letters cause more misunderstandings than they cure. It would have been folly for you to delay—culpable in you to neglect your interests. A man should be above the suspicion of marrying for money—not that any one who looked at Ginevra Rolt could for a moment harbour such a thought. But Sir Michael is getting on in years; and now that he sees you have feathered your own nest, he may be inclined to do something handsome in the matter of settlements."

"Ginevra's money shall be settled strictly upon herself,"

said Gilmore, somewhat nettled by Mr. Medlicott's tone. "Pray do not imagine that I have any desire to 'feather my nest' in the sense you suppose. I think I told you when the subject was first mooted, that I would marry no woman unless I loved her."

Mr. Medlicott took no umbrage at Gilmore's show of resentment. He accepted it as a commendable proof of proper feeling, and for the hundredth time gave himself credit for having, in the face of natural prejudice, discerned the true nobility of his friend's character. Mr. Medlicott held the opinion, in common with most men of an optimistic tendency, that laxity in morals is not incompatible with the finer virtues. He was gifted with a beautiful tolerance for human frailty, and was wont in moments of expansion to allude touchingly to certain lapses on his own part, which, as he avowed, had at least produced the beneficial result of widening his mental horizon.

"You mistake me, my dear Gilmore," he cried hastily. "Such a thought never crossed my mind. I consider your engagement to Ginevra Rolt one of the most perfect examples of genuine love on both sides which it has ever been my good fortune to witness. I foresaw it from the first. In fact, yours will be one of those marriages which seem too exceptionally the right thing to be within the bounds of possibility. Money, beauty, social desirability, love—what could be more suitable? I always said so. Mrs. Medlicott, who is a woman in a million, my dear Gilmore—but perhaps, like many women, a little inclined to be severe upon the—ahem—weakness of our sex—was doubtful upon the subject; but I shall always maintain that a man past his first youth, who has satisfied his curiosity, and knows what is what, makes the best husband in the long run. I should hold this opinion under all circumstances, but in your case, where there is love enough to float a man of war, no fear of shipwreck. It's a curious thing, the stress laid upon that point by my worthy departed friend. Not a man you would have suspected of sentimentalism, eh?"

"I did not know him," replied Gilmore softly; "but I must confess that I wish he had not carried his sentimentalism so far as to insist upon this most unnecessary delay."

"Come, come. You must not be unreasonable. Our dear Ginevra is no more than a baby. Her father was perfectly

right. She ought to have an opportunity for looking about her, and accustoming herself to her position, before she commits herself for life. A girl can't take in new impressions with a lover chained to her heels. She may fret after you at first, but the voyage will divert her mind, and she will be as happy as a young lark once she has got over the loss of her father. I'm hanged if I can understand such violent grief. The dear good doctor, in spite of being a genius, and one of those what-do-you-call-em's of humanity, was not exactly a demonstratively fond parent. How could one expect a man to have warm blood in his veins who spent his days in experimentalizing in snake poisons? . . . Now just take my advice, Gilmore. Don't dawdle. The San Francisco mail leaves next week. Go and join the Silverdenes in Melbourne, start off, make up to your father, and look after your property. I'll bring you your bride safe, happy, and constant. As soon as I have settled my own affairs and arranged Ginevra's business—and, by the way, I don't intend to realize the Leichardt's River Bridge Shares, and Government Railway debentures; they return good interest, and it shows confidence in the Colony—I shall start off *viâ* Torres' Straits with Mrs. Medlicott and my ward; and if by that time your six months are up, you can join us in Paris."

A telegram from Lady Silverdene settled the question. Gilmore telegraphed in reply that his berth might be engaged; then, a few days later, bade a sad farewell to the girl he loved; and with moisture, of which his manliness was not ashamed, blinding his eyes, and heaviness weighing upon his heart, took his last look at the plain and mountains of Birrali.

* * * * * *

The first months which succeeded Ginevra's bereavement passed to the young girl like a dream.

Sore grief, the wrench of parting with her lover, the solitariness of her position and novelty of her life under Mr. Medlicott's roof, at once bewildered and exhausted her. Slowly she began to realize that she was no longer the gay, uncared-for child, whose privilege it was to run as wild as she pleased upon the Birrali plain, her greatest pleasure a stretching gallop, her keenest interest a scientific experiment, and her highest ambition the winning of a smile from the cold lips of her father.

A subtle aroma of deference now encompassed her. She

was alternately flattered, consulted, and bantered by Mr. Medlicott, and caressed and instructed in morals and manners by his wife. That hard-featured lady was strangely tender to her young charge, though, with a delicacy of perception hardly to be surmised from her exterior, she soon learned that there was a line marking their relations which she might not overstep; and she at last wisely decided that the instillation of Pharisaical forms and conventional modes of thought would spoil one of Nature's choicest productions.

Thus there was, after a time, a tacit understanding that Ginevra should not be interfered with.

Nevertheless, the young girl's mental horizon enlarged rapidly, at first painfully. A short stay at Leichardt's Town with the Medlicott's hastened the process, and intensified her loneliness. It was at these times that she craved for Brian, and sought comfort in the reflection that a spiritual affinity bridged the gulf between them. But for her naturally resilient nature, she would have sorely needed pity. She had no part in the interests and occupations of her companions. Their world was a sealed book to her; the clack of their commonplace conversation wearied her, and she missed unconsciously the talk upon literature and scientific research which had constituted her chief intercourse with her father. Study without an object she found hateful; and in this respect her heart was deeply wounded. She had hoped for some legacy of unfinished work by which she might have glorified the philosopher's memory; and there was none. David Rolt had directed that his uncompleted manuscript should be destroyed, with, it seemed to Ginevra, this influencing thought, "My daughter is a woman. I humoured her by permitting her to fancy she was of use, but in reality she was a hindrance; and my work must perish with me."

This feeling added to her grief, and retrospection brought still more poignant pain for having so little past tenderness upon which to feed.

But Ginevra was young, healthy, and beloved; and under these conditions it is difficult for sorrow to crush animal spirits. How could she persistently mourn her father, when by the slightest effort of imagination she could live again the brief ecstatic time she had spent with Gilmore? There is no love so absolutely ideal as that of a very young girl for a man considerably her senior, combining, as it does, the

element of worship with that of passion, purified by complete innocence.

So four months of the probationary twelve passed away, and early in April the Medlicotts and Ginevra were sailing Englandwards, through the lovely, island-dotted Arafura sea.

PART II.

LED FORTH FOR SACRIFICE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HÔTEL DE L'EUROPE.

A BARELY furnished lofty room, breathing the mingled odours of food and Orientalism, and echoing with the sound of many voices.

Diverse are the representatives of nations. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers of Mesopotamia—might, with the addition of Europeans, be said in a literal as well as metaphorical sense to describe the assembled company.

A long table running down the centre of the salon, densely packed with hungry specimens of humanity; a punkah agitating unwholesome exhalations; an outer circle of dark, hurrying, smooth-footed attendants, whose heads exhibit promiscuously the distinctions of fez, turban, and pigtail; and through the wide windows and arches of the colonnade glimpses of glossy tropical greenery—feathery palms, strange fruits, wonderful flowers, *bizarre*, animated faces, and figures clad, some in little more than Nature's garments, others in brilliant sarongs, and rich-hued robes; glimpses of quaint dwellings and grotesque scenes, softened by the mellow radiance of a waning sun—all that goes to make up the life and picturesque beauty of Singapore.

The Hôtel de l'Europe was crowded. Two mail steamers had anchored in the harbour that morning, and the demand for accommodation exceeded the supply. The *table-d'hôte* was filled to overflowing; but in the colonnade another less

sumptuously adorned board had been spread, where the dilatory or modest might have a chance of finding room. But Mr. Andrew Medlicott, C.M.G., F.R.G.S., of Champneys Hall and Birrali, was not to be classed under the latter denomination. After a brief conference with the *maître-d'hôtel*, and a strenuous resistance of any effort to induct him into a lower place, he had pushed his way, followed by his wife and ward, to the head of the table, and had appropriated seats evidently reserved for some more or less distinguished individuals. The great man inflated his chest, elevated his chin, smiled in his blandest manner, and proceeded to make low-toned observations upon the row of faces opposite.

"There's my friend Ponsonby, Lord Tenby's son. He started on a tour of the world when I left for Australia; and at that rate a precious time he must have wasted in globe-trotting; travels *en prince*, and takes up all the black waiters. Fact is, ladies, I am treating you very shabbily, but you shall have your choice of a darkie or a celestial apiece to-morrow. Hallo, Decrice, what are you doing here? Secretary to the Maharajah, eh?—delighted to see you. My compliments to His Highness. I should like to take my ladies to Johore. Now, if you want to see genu*ine* Austrailia (aside) squatter and squatteress out on a lark, there it is opposite you."

Mr. Medlicott indicated a stout red-faced gentleman, uncertain in speech and shaky about the limbs, who was helplessly apostrophizing a bright-eyed Kling; and a lady also stout and high-complexioned, but by no means uncertain, whose gaze was stolidly fixed upon the table, while her tightly compressed lips indicated a resolve not to allow herself to be taken at a disadvantage by either European or Asiatic.

"James Freeman of Wooranga," continued Mr. Medlicott. "I'll bet you a shilling that he is going in the Messagerie boat with us. There's a nice go. A dear good fellow is Freeman—sat in the House—when he wasn't sitting in the Refreshment Room—began life as an explorer—rather before my time. Don't know what he explored, unless it was the Bar at the Royal in Leichardt's Town. I can answer for his knowing the lay of the country there. Was thoroughly acquainted with the 'water-shed,' the beer-shed, and the spirit tap—was Freeman, worthy soul! He hasn't many h's; in fact, if you were to ask me, I should say that you might

pick 'em up by the handful. What a wax he is in; not used to a *diner à la Russe*."

"Why the dickens don't they put the food upon the table?" blustered the ex-explorer. "Kickshaws and curry. Is there *nothing* else for a Christian man to eat? I've lived on curry since I left Australia. Wish I was there now. Rather any day be bushed in a mallee scrub; I might lay hold of a bandicoot anyhow. Why *don't* they bring me something?"

"Catch a Chinaman by his pigtail," grunted the sepulchral voice of an elderly gentleman opposite. "I've been badgered and bullied. I have had a very bad dinner. *I hate* Chinamen."

"The best cooks in the world, sir," cried a little adjutant lower down. "Ask Mr. Sill."

There was a titter: Mr. Sill was to the sepulchral gentleman as a red flag to a bull.

"I don't want to ask Mr. Sill," retorted the elderly gentleman in measured accents of concentrated bitterness. "Mr. Sill's opinion is worthless to me. It is his interest to praise Chinamen. He is a cunning dog is Mr. Sill. *He* wasn't born in Vermont State for nothing."

"That's the result of making friends on a voyage," remarked Mr. Medlicott, *sotto voce*. "If Mr. Sill becomes our fellow-passenger, Ginevra, give him a wide berth. By George, old Freeman has grabbed a darkie."

The explorer had deftly seized the muslin drapery of a passing Kling; but, alas! the loosely secured garment slowly unwound itself from the lithe form it enfolded, and remained limp in Mr. Freeman's grasp. The Kling vanished.

"I'd try another," drawlingly observed an American lady. "Guess some of them must use pins."

The explorer looked discomfited; and at this moment a dark, square-faced Englishman, who was sitting just below the Medlicott's, and near enough to have escaped their observation, bent forward, said a few words, and then directed the Chinese boy standing behind his chair to wait upon the Australian.

"Why, it is—— Bless my soul," cried Mr. Medlicott, "it's Will Cassilis to the rescue."

The dark gentleman, hearing his name, looked searchingly down the table and nodded pleasantly.

"I'm never surprised to see you turn up anywhere, Mr.

Medlicott," said a crisp, decided voice. "You are on your way home from Australia, I suppose. This Eastern line is a capital thing for you. You have missed the P. and O. boat. How long do you stay in Singapore? Ah! how do you do, Mrs. Medlicott?"

"Let me introduce you to my ward. Dr. Cassilis—Miss Ginevra Rolt," said Mr. Medlicott; and then he went on to explain that they were waiting for the Messageries Maritimes steamer—that it was solely on Miss Rolt's account that they patronized the French line. She wanted to see Singapore, Naples, Paris—the world, in short; he supposed they would be in Singapore a week longer, and he was very sorry for himself if this was a specimen of the *cuisine*—and didn't Mr. Freeman agree with him?

Mr. Freeman had naturally a good deal to say upon the subject, and while he was talking, Dr. Cassilis and Miss Rolt, who were sitting together, exchanged a few commonplace remarks and furtively inspected each other.

Though he was thirty-five, and just now worn by the effects of jungle fever, Will Cassilis might very well have passed for five and twenty. This youthfulness was not due to any fairness of colouring or lack of determination in the contour of his features—on the contrary, his skin was dark and the lines of his face clearly chiselled—but rather to an expression of alertness, vitality, and keen interest in life which, had he been sixty, would still have made him appear a young man. He was spare, and had, as far as could be seen, a wiry and well-knit frame. His head was rather small, with a good forehead, round which the hair grew sparsely. He had grey eyes, keen, and at the same time reflective, that looked at the questioner as straightly as the eyes of a child or an animal; a nose, long, fine at the point, and turned over so slightly to one side. This peculiarity may have imparted to the face that faintly humorous, marked air of individuality which it undoubtedly possessed; lips flexible, firm, half-concealed by a drooping moustache; and a somewhat heavy chin, almost hidden likewise by a short-pointed beard.

Ginevra's gaze was full of awakened interest. The name had touched a responsive chord in her memory, though it was not for some moments that she connected it with that memorable night upon which Brian had played pitch and toss with Destiny. When she did so, it was at once decided that

Dr. Cassilis had a claim upon her regard. She looked, listened, and was favourably impressed. Here was a man differing distinctly from Brian; refined, but not foppish; manly, without being uncouth. There was no trace of affectation or of self-assertiveness in his manner. His glance, his voice, a certain latent intention in his tone stimulated her interest and suggested points of congeniality. And was he not Brian's friend, and thus a link with her absent lover?

Will, in his turn, was at first half dazzled by the clear beauty of Ginevra's eyes and the brightness of her colouring. "If this be an Australian product, commend me to the fifth continent as a nursery for feminine perfection," was his wordless thought, followed by the mental qualification—"No; those eyes betray a dash of French blood, or my ethnological acuteness is at fault." When he had drawn her into some sort of bald conversation, he examined her critically in the steady manner which a doctor who relies upon mental diagnosis unconsciously acquires. She had partially turned, and was looking diagonally athwart him, a position which assisted observation. She might have been a picture, only that no picture could have given back the variations of expression in her face, or could have affected him so powerfully. It flashed through his mind that she resembled Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci, which by its many copies the world knows so well. Her look exhibited the same mingling of innocence, subdued playfulness, and deep melancholy which are there so wonderfully blended. But, again, her curved brows and long-shaped eyes were more after the pattern of Leonardo da Vinci's Madonnas; while when she laughed softly, as though she were not unaware of his scrutiny, there was a subtle suggestion of an arch child-like head by Greuze. But after a few moments all these vague likenesses seemed to float away or melt in the charm of her own individuality, and only the sweet sadness in his mind remained.

How different in bearing was this girl, he reflected, to the ladies who at intervals broke the line of men down the long table—ladies fair and dark, graceful and angular, usually with fringed locks and self-conscious smiles, mostly dressed with an exaggerated regard to fashion, in narrow-shouldered gowns of thin material, which lightly veiled prominent collar-bones. All wore furbelows of lace, and chains, and the profusion of bangles and ornaments affected by belles in the

East. Each possessed the easy assurance which distinguishes the typical travelled soldier's wife. Compared with these, Ginevra appeared to Dr. Cassilis like a visitant from another sphere.

"And what are you doing in the Hôtel de l'Europe, Cassilis?" asked Mr. Medlicott, when he had somewhat appeased the cravings of appetite, and had swallowed a couple of glasses of dry sherry, which he graciously pronounced to be not so bad as might have been expected. "I thought you were combining the practice of medicine in Singapore with the pursuit of science, flora and fauna of the Malay Archipelago, and that sort of thing—had a house, and everything but a wife to make you feel settled for life."

Will laughed pleasantly. "I am doing just what you are, Mr. Medlicott—waiting for the Messageries boat to land me at Marseilles. A man can't hold out against jungle fever, though mine was only a slight attack. I am going to try London as a field for my labours."

"Then we shall be seeing you in Woodfordshire, and you must come and shoot some partridges at Champneys in September."

"If you have not grown too serious to care about partridge-shooting," said Mrs. Medlicott.

"I am always intensely serious where good sport is in question," answered Will, and his eyes meeting those of Ginevra, both smiled. "I see, Mrs. Medlicott," he added, "that you haven't lost your old grudge against me for becoming a doctor. I hope that all the Woodfordshire people are well. You have been in the county more lately than I, and have doubtless done your duty towards it."

"And whom do you think we *have* seen quite lately?" exclaimed Mr. Medlicott. "A Woodfordshire person, and one of your own people."

"I can guess easily. You mean Brian Gilmore. He wrote to me a few months ago from Leichardt's Town." Suddenly a look of intelligence, it seemed almost of irritated surprise, passed over Cassilis's face. He glanced at Ginevra, but her eyes were turned away. "I am glad that Brian has come in for Little Fretterly. As far as I can learn, he was only wasting his time in Australia."

"He wasted his time to some purpose," began Mr. Medlicott jocosely—then paused, respecting the flame signals on his

ward's face. "Gilmore was not a man to do well on the Barcoo. He could not stand the life."

"I am not surprised at that," said Will impulsively; "I think that in his position at that time he was wrong to go out to Australia."

"You really mean that, taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration?"

"Most certainly," replied Will shortly.

There was a short pause. Dr. Cassilis applied himself to his food; and Ginevra's eyes looked him through and through. What right had this man, cousin or no cousin, to disapprove of Brian's conduct? Her colour rose higher, and a question almost passed her lips. But she checked it; and Will, glancing up, and vaguely disturbed by her gaze, turned the conversation into another channel by asking what she thought of the approach to Singapore.

And now the dinner was over. A light breeze from the sea freshened the stuffy air which the punkah had unpleasantly stirred. The smoking viands had been carried away, and luscious bananas, lately gathered pine-apples, and odorous mangosteens shed a delicious fruity fragrance over the table. The chatter of voices momentarily heightened, then subsided, and was succeeded by a flutter of drapery as the ladies filed out of the room, trooping in ones and twos up the broad staircase, and scattering themselves in the piazza which overlooked the Esplanade.

CHAPTER II.

SINGAPORE BY NIGHT.

GINEVRA moved apart from the others and stood restlessly fanning herself with a palmetto leaf, while Mr. Medlicott pointed out the various steamers at anchor in the bay.

"Tell me, please," said she irrelevantly, "is Dr. Cassilis a great friend of Colonel Gilmore's?"

"He is his cousin, my dear. Will Cassilis's mother was Lady Gilmore's sister."

"Does he know that I have promised to marry Brian?"

"Certainly not, unless Gilmore has written to tell him so. I shall take the first opportunity of informing him of the fact!"

"On no account. I am particularly anxious that he should be kept in ignorance as long as possible."

"What can be your reason, Miss Whimsey?"

"I am not sure that I like him."

"That is a poor one, and it doesn't affect his relations with Brian."

"He seems fond of finding fault. I dare say he is difficult to please. I am not sure that he will like me."

Mr. Medlicott laughed. "Has not Brian taught you that you are independent of criticism?"

"That is not what I wish. Don't you understand?" she added with childlike petulance. "I want to make a good impression. I want to stand on neutral ground with Dr. Cassilis till we have decided whether we are going to be friends or the reverse. It's a fancy of mine—a foolish one probably—but I have a right to fancies, haven't I? so you must promise to let me reveal my own secret when and how I choose."

"Very well. My jurisdiction does not extend over your secrets, I suppose. Let me know when the tableau is prepared, and I am required to step forward as the stage father. But the old lady must be cautioned, or Cassilis will be congratulating you and himself before an hour has passed."

Almost as soon as he had placed the necessary restrictions upon Mrs. Medlicott's communicativeness Dr. Cassilis approached them; and plans were mooted for the evening's amusement.

"Mr. Medlicott!" cried Ginevra, stretching forth her hand towards the shadowy city with its many coloured lights. "There's a world below us, and I am longing to explore its wonders. Remember that I am being educated; and that I have an enterprising spirit. Life, life! I'm thirsty for life," she exclaimed impetuously, turning her sparkling eyes suddenly upon Will. "Does not every one who is young crave after knowledge? Take me to walk in the streets, Mr. Medlicott."

"You can't walk in Singapore by night, my dear; but if you like we'll drive. Let me think—what could we go to see?"

"Don't you recollect telling me about the Chinese theatre? Now take me there; I should like to compare a Chinese play

with an English one. It would 'nae doot be an experience,' as your Scotch friend on the steamer used to remark."

"An experience that I have no desire to share with you," said Mrs. Medlicott benignly; "but my husband is an overgrown baby when there is anything out of the common to be seen. He'll be delighted to take you. As for me, I shall write Australian letters."

Ginevra ran off to put on her hat and cloak.

"I don't understand that girl," observed Mrs. Medlicott reflectively. "She goes off at a tangent from one thing to another. She is no more than a baby, notwithstanding her strange notions and fine phrases. Three months ago she had hardly spirit to eat her meals. I sometimes think that she cannot be capable of deep feeling."

"Oh, you must be wrong!" exclaimed Cassilis, with that occasionally impulsive speech which was at variance with his ordinary manner; then added more decidedly than his short acquaintance with Miss Rolt might be supposed to warrant, "I am certain that it is a beautiful nature."

Ginevra returned; and the three walked down to the courtyard of the hotel, where were stationed the light bamboo ghawries with their native drivers, and sprightly Timor ponies which are to be seen in Singapore.

Mr. Medlicott engaged one of these and handed in his ward. "You'll come with us, Cassilis?"

"Thank you. I am afraid I cannot. I have a visit to pay in the Military Compound, and some other things to do—unless," he added, pausing, "you don't mind dropping me at the Dhobi lines. It's as pretty a drive as any other, and you will have quite enough of the theatre later. Miss Rolt may like to see the town, but let me advise you to keep clear of the canal."

Thus it was settled, and Will stepped in and seated himself opposite Ginevra. The driver uttered a cry. The ponies scuttled fleetly along, and the girl leaned forward with pleased wonder upon her face, smiling at the unfamiliar Oriental scenes through which they seemed to fly.

It was a feast night. Joss candles burned in the windows of Chinese shops, coloured lanterns swung from the door-posts, and bright little rockets, which made a crackling noise when they exploded, fizzed up in the streets. There was in the air a confusion of strange tongues and unwonted noises, and the

thoroughfares, as they proceeded into the heart of the city, became too crowded to admit of rapid movement. Phlegmatic Armenians, picturesque objects in their long robes and bright head-gear, stalked along, hardly swerving as the gharry rattled close past them. Excited children, like little black and yellow demons, leered out of unexpected nooks. Here, a group of Chinese chattered round a fruit stall, or in front of a barber's shop. There, a cluster of Klings squatted contentedly upon the pavement. Bengalese and Malays gesticulated behind their wares, and quaintly tired Eastern heads bobbed backwards and forwards from projecting windows or rose-curtained balconies. It was all inexpressibly dirty, glittering, and bewildering.

Suddenly Mr. Medlicott spied some Indian *repoussé* work in a stall heaped with curiosities, and expressed his wish to inspect it more closely.

"Excuse me," he said, as he stopped the gharry and got out. "You won't mind waiting while I try to screw a bargain out of that son of the desert. It's the very thing that Mrs. Medlicott has had her heart set upon."

Cassilis and Ginevra were left alone.

"Does this amuse you?" he asked, bending towards her.

She had been laughing softly to herself. She turned with a start.

"Oh yes. Do look at that comical little man being shaved —and that one who is measuring the length of his pig-tail— no, on this side."

And she laid her hand innocently for a second on his arm. Her touch thrilled him, but it was no more than the frank gesture of a child. She laughed again, proceeding with her comments, which were sufficiently lively to attract his attention and provoke his mirth. Then she paused, seeing that he did not catch the infection of her vivacity. These sights were not new to him, and he was thinking of her, not of them.

"You are not amused; and your silence is a reproof to me," she exclaimed, with a sort of petulant hesitation. "You make me feel angry with myself. I am like a heartless infant whose grief can be cured by a new toy."

"But why should you say that?" asked Cassilis eagerly. "I had no thought of reproving you. Of course, the idea is absurd. I'll tell you what was in my mind then, and which

perhaps made me look grave. I was wishing that you might be always as gay as you are now."

Suddenly he perceived that her eyes glistened with tears.

"You know nothing about me," said Ginevra; then touched her black gown, and added simply: "I lost my father a few months ago. And when his life ended, mine seemed to begin. Isn't it natural that I should reproach myself at a moment like this? It is heartless of me to feel gay and happy, while he is lying lonely and unmourned far away under the Birrali Crag."

"Oh, do not try to cultivate melancholy," said Will impulsively. "If it were possible for the dead to see into our hearts, would they not wish that we should be happy? One could not imagine them to be more selfish than the living. . . . And do you know that when I looked at you for the first time to-day, I thought your face one of the saddest I had ever seen? It gave me an uncomfortable sensation. If I were superstitious I might suppose it to indicate that you were predestined to misfortune."

"Are you not superstitious?" she asked, and her eyes lingered questioningly on his face. "Or, rather, is it superstition to believe that our lives are ordered by natural forces which we have no power to control; so that when we feel most certain of our free-will we are only unconsciously making our own destinies?"

"Come life, come death, come joy, come woe. Allah is great, and Mahomet is His Prophet," said Will; "but Eastern apathy is not our characteristic, and I think fatalism must always be the result of painful struggling. You are too young to have wrestled with old forms."

"I have known none to wrestle with," answered Ginevra, half sadly.

They were both silent for a few moments. The ponies moving on brought them before an Oriental façade, brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps, where a picturesquely dressed Armenian held up rich-hued stuffs and glittering embroidery to tempt the throng which pressed by.

"How beautiful and unreal it all looks!" exclaimed Ginevra; "I could almost fancy this a scene in a dream."

"You might find the dream turn to a nightmare, if—and Heaven forbid—you were suddenly transported to the native quarter," rejoined Cassilis. "Your impressions are keen, Miss Rolt. You have not travelled much."

"I have travelled nowhere. I know no place in the world but the Australian Bush."

"Oh yes. You know many other places. You have read; and your imagination has created pictures. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps that is why my mind is full of odd fancies," said Ginevra softly.

"Tell me some of them," asked Will, with the eagerness of suddenly aroused interest.

"Now I wonder," said Ginevra thoughtfully, "whether you know the strange sensation which seizes one at times—of separateness, as it were, from the actual life, so that one seems to be moving in a dream and looking on at things, and yet feeling at the same time in one's own person, what appears to be only represented before one—I express myself very badly—and the air is full of murmurings, and there is the consciousness of some mysterious Presence——"

"Yes," said Will. "I have felt something of what you describe, when I have taken haschisch with a view to ascertaining whether happiness might not be portable."

"Ah!" murmured Ginevra. "It isn't any spiritual influence then. There's no rising above the physical basis. In my case you have results without the haschisch. But it is not always a happy feeling. The present often seems vaguely troubled, dim, and uncertain. Sometimes I fancy that I am walking by a stony way at the side of a deep precipice; and below me there is a glorious city with shining palaces and marble temples, and beautiful gardens. Smiling faces welcome me, and outstretched arms beckon to me. . . ." Ginevra paused, and a deep blush suffused her countenance. "I don't know why I talk to you in this way. It is strange, isn't it?"

"No; it is not at all strange. Tell me more. You have never yet entered this enchanted city?"

"Never yet. I stand above on the brink of the precipice, and seem to be waiting alone for some one to lead me downwards."

"And then?"

"There is no more to tell. Everything melts away, leaving only a vague impression of happiness."

"Happiness! That is well—and unusual. And now tell me another fancy."

"I am sitting in a dark room; and in a mellow light

without, scenes and people pass by—some lingering a little longer than the rest—some faces smiling as it were in sympathy; but I am alone all the while—save for the familiar spirit beside me."

"Who or what is that?"

Ginevra smiled seriously. "I will not tell you now. Perhaps I may some day."

Cassilis was silent for a moment, then said: "I am not certain whether you are to be pitied for being of an imaginative temperament. Just now, it may be to you a source of joy. But you will never be contented to accept life at its exact value. You will always be comparing, analyzing, anticipating. It is that vague underlying suggestiveness, which deprives existence of zest. I don't know which is most fatal to satisfaction—to look forward or to look back."

"Ah!" said Ginevra in a tone of childish confidence, "I do not agree with you. I am sure that there is nothing so delightful as the anticipation of pleasant things. One cannot feel miserable over either the present or the past, when one has before one a future certain to be happy."

Will regarded her with tender curiosity. Already many dim speculations concerning her were flitting through his mind, and blending with his wonder he felt a curious sensation of pity. "I suppose that you have every right to a happy future," he said. "You are young and beautiful, keenly impressionable, and with the power of giving and awakening sympathy. No one would willingly be cold or cruel to you. It is not probable that you will ever knock against any of reality's hard corners; and if there is any truth in what one reads about the rapture of love, you are more likely than most persons to taste it." He spoke in a thoughtful tone which neutralized the freedom of his speech.

"Do you not believe that there is truth in it?" asked Ginevra with innocent audacity, but not directly indicating her meaning.

Will shook his head; then, as if to qualify his mute denial, added: "If there is, I have not yet found it. I think there are more noble and more beautiful aims in life than love."

"What? How?"

"Love is selfish. It is not selfish to labour with a view to benefiting one's race. It is not selfish to search after knowledge."

"I should like to make you believe in love," said Ginevra softly. The note of tenderness in her voice thrilled Will strangely. A vain man might have attributed to it some personal meaning; but no thought of this nature entered Will's mind. The conversation, unconventional as it had been, struck no chord of surprise, but seemed to him in harmony with the young girl's transparent candour, his own impressions concerning her, and the fantastic scene around them. . . . Just then Mr. Medlicott, a parcel under his arm, returned to the gharry, exulting over his purchase.

"I have been an unconscionable time," said that gentleman, "but I knew that you would be amused, Ginevra. The old Mussulman was as hard as nails, and swore by Mahomet and the Koran that for not less than a hundred dollars should I have my tray. But this dog of a Christian was never yet outdone in a bargain; and I have got the thing for fifty."

When they reached the Dhobi lines—a long low range of buildings, dimly lighted and with dusky figures flitting before the open windows—Cassilis bade them good night and descended, saying that he would walk the rest of his way. The Australians drove on for a short distance, between cocoa-nut plantations, and bamboo hedges, and bits of uncleared forest, where the atmosphere was heavy with the perfume of full-lipped waxen flowers, and the darkness illuminated by myriads of fire-flies which glowed among the lower jungle-like vegetation. Now glossy-leaved branches of tropical trees closed them in overhead, and the tall white trunks of one species of forest giant, with fruit issuing from the stem in yellow ball-like protuberances, rose gauntly against the blackness of foliage. The air seemed thick with exhalations; there were uncanny murmurings; and the rustle of palm-leaves and shivering of bamboos mingled with the sound of native voices as the gharry flew past some isolated fruit-shop or Eastern dwelling. Presently the driver turned, and by a circuitous route arrived again at the native quarter of the city, finally stopping before the theatre, where Mr. Medlicott dismissed him, and led Ginevra within the building.

The place they entered was dingy and reeking with vile Oriental fumes. Upon the stage, against a background of Chinese screens, painted in unnatural perspective, a tragi-comic melodrama was in course of enaction. The chief

points in the performance, which was of course unintelligible to the new-comers, were the sudden and frequent deaths of the characters, and the readiness with which they came to life when the exigencies of the piece demanded their resuscitation. The atmosphere was sickening; the punkah waved languidly. As the stage business proceeded, the gestures of the actors became more animated, the mirth ribald. Below the dais, laughter resounded freely, betel was chewed, and bhang quaffed plenteously.

"I think the old lady was right," remarked Mr. Medlicott, mopping his face. "This sort of entertainment is only suitable for a child or a fool; and as we don't want to class ourselves under either heading, Ginevra, I vote that we clear out."

Bidding Ginevra cling tightly to his arm, Mr. Medlicott elbowed his way through the crowd, which so thickened as they neared the entrance, that to return, had they wished it, would have been impossible.

They were again in the street, the warm night air breathing gratefully upon their faces. In a moment the door had closed behind them, and was blocked up by a pressing throng. Wild cries sounded on all sides. A dense mass of human beings was surging like a great wave down the narrow way. Panic-stricken faces were turned upwards, and arms waved in frantic gesticulations.

Ginevra shrieked in terror; Mr. Medlicott, still holding her firmly, mounted a stone bench, against which he had that moment stumbled, and surveyed the scene. But the lamps opposite seemed as by magic to have been extinguished; and in the dimness it was impossible to distinguish where the confusion began or ended.

"Keep cool; I don't think it's anything to be frightened at, but there's certainly some row up. Ginevra, my dear, lay hold of this post, and stick to it like old gooseberry. I see a gharry across the way, but I daren't try to pull you through that crowd. You'll be safe here, if you stand perfectly still for one minute while I get the man to clear a way. The sooner we are out of this the better."

CHAPTER III.

WILL CASSILIS TO THE RESCUE.

HARDLY had Mr. Medlicott quitted Ginevra's side than the confusion in the street became wild tumult, and the crowd, which had gathered higher, swept down like a mighty flood, carrying all before its resistless strength, while a thousand voices caught up the frenzied shout—"*Amok, Amok!*"

Ginevra's shrieks and Mr. Medlicott's horrified calls were lost in the din. He, in spite of his size and strength, was borne helplessly onward by the human torrent, and the girl, clutching the post, and wedged between two portly Asiatics, faint and almost suffocated, believed that her last hour was come.

She felt something sharp strike her arm, but was too terrified to be sensible of pain. A rabble of apparently murderous demoniacs, brandishing staves and daggers, and uttering maniacal cries closed in round her like a pack of devils. There was a sudden recoil, and through a rift in the agitated swarm she saw for a moment the centre of the street where was a narrow track clear as for a race, and bearing down upon her amid the blows and sword-thrusts of the bystanders, a mad Malayan was running his course.

He was naked save for a girdle round his loins. In each hand he held a pointed *kriss*, and running uncertainly in zigzag fashion struck with wild aim at those who pressed him closest. The lurid light of an upheld torch streamed full upon him, and shed quivering rays upon the glittering knives and infuriated faces. The Malay's daggers were reeking. His body streamed with gore. Wounds gaped upon his bare legs and breast. His head was bent down like that of an assaulting bull. His eyes, through their veil of blood, shot sparks of frenzy. Though ruthlessly stabbed from behind and before, the madman continued with almost superhuman strength to wield his murderous weapons, and to hold his pursuers from close grappling.

Like a spectre from the Inferno he passed.

The Saturnalian vision vanished. The crowd swept on. After a few moments the yells grew fainter. During the rush

Ginevra had clung for dear life to the post which had been her only protection. Now, bruised and trembling, she remained stranded like a piece of *débris* after an inundation. She was sick with terror; faintness overpowered her, and she felt a confused sense of pain. But horror again revived her faculties. Glancing down the street, she saw, a little way off, a company of fierce-looking Klings, who she fancied were returning to kill her. Instinct bade her escape at all hazards. She fled like one possessed, down a dark alley and along an empty pathway, till she had reached the bank of the canal. Its murky waters were in a state of bubbling agitation, and the Chinese junks and Indian prahus bobbed strangely up and down, their coloured lights streaking the slimy surface with wavering reflections. Upon the opposite shore moving figures gesticulated wildly, and presently a shot was fired into the foul blackness. It was evident that the Amok-runner, curiously combining the impulse of self-preservation with that of destruction, had dived beneath the boats.

Where could she find safety? . . . Like a hunted animal Ginevra turned again and fled—through the fantastic labyrinth of card-like dwellings that swarmed with half-naked creatures and twinkled with coloured lanterns—flying before the voices that sounded in her ears, the hands that sought to detain her.

After a little while, she paused breathless in a brilliantly lighted square, where a small crowd had assembled round a dancing-woman—a Malay, with black, gleaming eyes and sensual lips, whose head was bedecked with a tiara of mock gems, while scanty drapery fluttered round her lithe brown limbs, as she moved to and fro in a series of voluptuous undulations to the rhythmic measure of wind instruments.

Panting and dazed, Ginevra leaned against the deserted-looking doorway of a house where all seemed dark and still. But presently the latch was lifted softly; a man issued forth; and startled in new terror, the poor girl would have sped away once more but for the clutch that held her back.

"Good God!" cried Will Cassilis. "Miss Rolt! Are you alone? Do you know that you are standing on the threshold of an opium den? Where is Mr. Medlicott? What in the name of Heaven are you doing here?"

"You were right. It—it *has* turned into a nightmare," she said hysterically, clinging closely to him; and for a

moment too bewildered and relieved to speak further. Then she half sobbed her incoherent explanation.

Glancing at Will's face, she saw that it was very pale, and felt his arm clasp hers convulsively. "Don't be troubled about me," she murmured. "I am safe now."

"Yes; safe! But to think of what might have happened! . . . I ought not to have left you. Could not Mr. Medlicott have guarded you better? Come—come away. This is no place for you."

He partly led, partly dragged her from what he felt to be a scene of contamination, not pausing till he had hailed an unoccupied gharry which was being driven slowly down one of the wider thoroughfares. He placed Ginevra inside the vehicle, then stepped after her.

"Hôtel de l'Europe," he cried; and the ponies scampered on.

As they were whirled through better lighted ways, he watched his companion with anxious solicitude. The spectacle she presented was pitiful indeed. Her cloak had been lost in the scuffle at the theatre door. Her thin black dress had been rudely torn from her shoulder, which, soft and white as that of a child, seemed to appeal to all his tenderness. The left arm was bared; and a deep jagged cut, which had been inflicted by the dagger-hilt of one of the Armenians between whom she had been crushed, was bleeding slowly. At first she sat erect with evident effort; then her frame relaxed; she grew very white, and sank back with closed eyelids and nerveless hands. Cassilis stooped over her and inquired if she felt faint.

"Do you think that you could tell him—to drive a little slower?" she whispered. "It hurts me going so fast."

Cassilis leaned out, and gave the driver directions in Malay; Ginevra lay back motionless. He thought she was swooning, and searched her belt for a *vinaigrette;* but, unlike the Indian ladies in the hotel, she wore no *châtelaine.* With his handkerchief he staunched and bound up her wound, while his arm supported her against his shoulder. Her hands were very cold; he gently chafed them between his own. After a few moments she roused herself—she had never been quite unconscious—and opened her eyes, looking up into his face with her sweet candid smile, and showing none of the embarrassment which many a girl might have felt at awakening to find herself the heroine of so novel an adventure.

Cassilis, in spite of his solicitude, was conscious of a thrill of excitement which, had she been an ordinary patient committed to his charge under commonplace conditions, he could never have experienced. It was, however, quickly repressed. What was he but a doctor—placed by virtue of his profession in a neutral region far beyond such social or conventional influences?

It was indicative of the curious revolution which during the last few hours had deranged Will's mental equilibrium, that this reflection, faintly flavoured with bitterness, should pass through his mind now.

Ginevra withdrew herself from the support of his arm.

"I am better, thank you. But if you knew how frightened I was! Oh, those terrible men!"

"I don't wonder that you were frightened," said Cassilis. "And I pulled you along roughly. I must have hurt your arm. But I thought of nothing except the getting you away from that abominable place. You are trembling"—and he began to chafe her hands again. "We shall soon be at the hotel."

His fingers lingered on hers. The contact, his tenderness and aid, and her trustful responsiveness seemed, short as had been their intercourse, to establish a crisis in their mutual relations. And yet he was angry with himself for allowing the personal feeling with which she had inspired him, to influence his professional attitude.

"I see that you have been bruised and scratched," he went on. "I hope that it is nothing more. When we reach the hotel you must let me see what these savages have done to you."

"It is more than a dream now anyway," she said softly, and added with a little laugh, "Poor Mr. Medlicott! He will be so dreadfully unhappy at having lost me."

They did not speak again till they had entered the courtyard. When the gharry drew up, he bade her sit still for a minute, and ran into the house, whence he brought a wrap, and placed it over her shoulders, so that her disordered appearance might not be remarked by the loiterers in the piazza or on the staircase.

Mrs. Medlicott, with a tumbler of iced water beside her, and a fan, fitfully agitated, in one hand, was still writing letters in the deserted salon. She threw up her hands with horror when they appeared.

"Gracious!" she ejaculated. "*What* has happened? Have you had a fall, Ginevra? Where is Mr. Medlicott?"

Dr. Cassilis explained in a few words what had occurred, and placed Ginevra in a chair, removing the cloak with which he had covered her, and with deft fingers cutting away her torn bodice. Mrs. Medlicott, who was a good nurse and full of tender sympathy for physical hurt, ran for some wine from her travelling flask, and carefully tended Ginevra while Cassilis ascertained the extent of her injuries, and bound up the bruised arm, which was discovered to be also slightly sprained.

It was not till after Ginevra had been put to bed and quieted with an opiate, that Mr. Medlicott, in a state of wild excitement and alarm, bereft of hat, stick, coat, and *repoussé* tray, returned to the hotel. He gasped with relief, and fervently shook Cassilis's hand at the news of his ward's rescue.

"My *dear* boy!" he cried breathlessly. "Was there ever such luck? Luck! It was Providence. What should I have done if anything had happened to that dear girl? I blame myself. That Chinese theatre was not a place to take her to. But who could have foretold that there would be this tumult? They say it is over thirty years since it happened last. You saw the brute. The soldiers potted him in the canal. But how did you turn up in that end of the town?"

"My friend at the Military Compound was away from home," replied Cassilis composedly; "and I went into an opium den in the hope of finding a young English sailor in whom I am interested, and who I fear is killing himself in one of these devilish holes."

"And Ginevra was standing there. Good Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Medlicott, his florid face paling. "What should I have said to——" He pulled himself up on the point of revealing the secret with which Ginevra had whimsically charged him, and instead, launched into a general account of his ward, her parentage, fortune, and the circumstances under which he had become her guardian.

"And she is David Rolt's daughter," said Will Cassilis musingly, as he lit his cigar on the balcony. It seemed to him that he now understood her better, and saw more clearly the reason of those indefinable peculiarities which so fasci-

nated him. He was familiar with the writings of the Birrali scientist, and more than once had they opened to him a new path for inquiry. Physiological research in relation to psychic problems was his favourite study. He was a man who, without any great imaginative faculty or keenness of insight, speculated deeply upon the enigmas of life. He had chosen medicine as a profession, more from strong bent and a conviction of its scientific importance, than from any serious consideration of its advantages as a mode of procuring a competence. In a monetary sense he was at the present time independent of labour, having inherited a moderate fortune by the death of an elder brother. Though his tendencies were far from being morbid, he could hardly be said to possess a healthy interest in life and its pleasures; and was himself half-conscious of the fact that the energy which he threw into his work was the safety-valve for restless craving after some defined truth, and a means of escape from painful self-analysis and an irresistible desire to probe below the surface interests of existence. He had put out feelers in many directions, considering it his first duty to benefit his fellows, in so much as lay in his power, striving to cultivate the practical rather than the abstract or intellectual. Thus in doubts or difficulties Cassilis's friends found him always ready to lend a helping hand, and were often surprised at a wideness of sympathy which they had been scarcely justified in expecting. But even they were apt to discern, underneath the outward healthiness, a certain coldness and apathy—a faint suggestion of cynicism which told that in reality indifference lay at the very core of the man's nature.

Will sometimes attributed his deep-seated dissatisfaction to longing for and impossibility of belief in a personal God; at others to the loneliness of his position, which presented no outlet for natural affection; and he had seriously considered marriage as a remedy for the evil.

But whether from lack of opportunity or inclination, he had not married—had never even acknowledged himself to be genuinely in love. A physician is apt to view abstract womanhood from too material a stand-point to be easily led into sentimental relations with the sex. It is a truism that doctors rarely fall in love with their patients; another, that occupation is the best safeguard against romantic fervour. Outside the circle of his work Cassilis had formed few

feminine intimacies. Friendship he understood. Of love, as a swift compelling force, he had no knowledge.

The two men lingered for some little time in desultory talk upon Malay customs and manners. Then Mr. Medlicott retired to join his wife, and Will was left alone on the balcony.

From the thoroughfare below, and distant crowded streets, there floated towards him all those quaint Eastern sounds which spoke of the varied throbbing life of this Asiatic city. Before him, beyond the low-lying houses and mass of dull green vegetation, stretched the sea, a pallid luminous lake—aqua-marine, tipped by moonlight. A soft warm breeze kissed his face; the perfume of tropical flowers breathed upon him wooingly, and stirred in his soul a sweet, fantastic tumult. He found himself listening to the murmurs from within, and wondering whether Ginevra slept. He felt again that delicious thrill which the touch of her cold hands, and the pressure of her slight form when he had supported her in the gharry, had sent through his frame. His heart beat more quickly, and he drew a deep breath. There stole over him a kind of awe, like the sense of warning which precedes revelation.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL AND GINEVRA.

GINEVRA'S arm ached dully upon the morrow, and she was languid and feverish—a condition of things due as much to the effects of the opiate, the alarm and excitement, as to the injuries she had sustained. But Mrs. Medlicott was one of those persons who, when the pretext for a doctor's presence arises, is apt to take full advantage of the occasion; and it was at her request that upon the following day Cassilis visited Miss Rolt.

He had been joyfully anticipating the summons, despising himself at the same time for the eagerness with which he hailed it. The blood rose to his face as he entered the young girl's chamber; and though all his professional composure

was called to his aid, he found it impossible to subdue a certain guilty feeling of pleasure, which gave place immediately to one of angry shame. It almost seemed to him that he was taking a mean advantage of his position, as he held the hand which she offered him so frankly, counting the throbs of her pulse with secret joy in the contact, and noting how well the muslin dressing-gown which she wore harmonized with her girlish grace and clear paleness: while all the time his own fingers trembled, and he was irritated by the knowledge that his grave manner masked an inexplicable agitation. He examined Ginevra's arm, and renewed the bandage, prescribing quiet and sleep, and softly confining his remarks to the business of his visit; then rose to join Mrs. Medlicott, who, with the door ajar, was talking to her husband in the next room. But Ginevra seemed anxious to detain Will.

"It is too tight; it hurts," said she with her pathetic smile, lifting her arm.

He paused and loosened the bandage. As he stooped over her to do so, she seemed to examine him attentively.

"Your sleeping draught last night was not as successful as it might have been," she said.

"Have you not slept then?"

"Not since two o'clock this morning, but that was nothing. It was the awful stillness and the fiendish faces which I saw as vividly as I see yours now that made the night terrible."

"There was opium in your draught, and I gave you too little. You shall have a stronger dose to-night, if you need it."

"Don't you think it strange," said Ginevra, "that we should begin our acquaintance as doctor and patient?"

"I am sorry for your sake that it has begun so, but I hope that the position won't last long."

"It is a good position for people to be in who want to find out whether they are likely to be friends," said Ginevra gravely.

Will was taken aback by her coolness. He blundered over the bandage. "Is that our case?" he asked.

"I think it is mine. I don't know whether you feel in the same way." There was a moment's pause. "I have not thanked you for what you did for me last night," said Ginevra.

"It was a mere accident my coming across you," replied Will, "and a most fortunate one."

"Perhaps it too was 'fatality,'" said Ginevra thoughtfully. She raised her eyes to his and smiled confidingly. "I *do* thank you; not for my own sake altogether. I hope that we shall be friends by-and-by."

"I am certain that we shall," replied Will fervently. "It must rest with you."

"Then we will be friends;" and Ginevra frankly tendered her hand which remained—for a moment clasped in that of Will.

"Do you remember," continued Ginevra, "what I said to you when we were waiting in the gharry—about life seeming like so many sliding pictures? Yours is one of the faces that looked back sympathetically. You have stepped out of the frame now, and have become real. When I was a very little girl," she went on irrelevantly. "I was taken to see a Corroboree. I have never forgotten it—the weird black figures with their painted stripes and tattooed breasts, dancing round the camp-fires, waving their spears and boomerangs, and singing an unearthly sort of war-cry—it haunted me for a long time. Now, in my nightmares, I shall see that running madman of last night."

At that moment Mrs. Medlicott, who had listened in some surprise to Ginevra's remarks, entered the room, and began asking Cassilis some questions. Presently they both went out to the piazza, leaving Ginevra alone.

The girl leaned her head back upon the pillows, and fell into an exquisite reverie. Her eyes closed and her mouth relaxed into a soft smile. She pictured the meeting with Brian, and, in imagination, heard his voice and felt the touch of his lips upon hers.

Glancing involuntarily towards her as he passed the door, Will saw her thus, and was struck by the silent passion of her look.

A cold self-contained woman in loving one man loves herself; a woman with a highly wrought temperament is warmly suffusive towards all men, as in a manner representative of *the* one. Thus all outward experience fed Ginevra's inward joy. The impression made upon her by Will Cassilis, the sympathy between them, and her wish to gain his good opinion, seemed, in some mysterious way, at once to issue from, and to reinforce, this fount of sweet emotion.

Mrs. Medlicott had felt it her duty to address to her young charge some slight caution against undue freedom of speech. She returned to the bedroom for that purpose, but as she looked at the softly radiant face and innocent lips, her reproof died before it was uttered; and she stood for several moments watching Ginevra and pondering upon the enigma which this young girl represented, as she might have reflected upon a moral problem.

Several times lately during moods of silent dreaminess, Mrs. Medlicott had observed this transfiguration of Ginevra's features, and had divined that the girl's fancy was with her lover. At these moments she dimly realized the might of true passion.

"I wonder if she guesses—I wonder if she has the least idea what men are," mused Mrs. Medlicott, euphemistically phrasing her thoughts.

The old lady had never had occasion to conjecture in this fashion concerning her own daughters. They had graduated discreetly in knowledge of the world. Their affections had been under the control of expediency, and when they had married—the youngest a gentleman much older than herself, with a large rent-roll and a past—it had not suggested itself to Mrs. Medlicott that they required any instruction in the difficult ways of life.

But this young creature, who had never known her mother, and who for training and enlightenment had been dependent upon her recluse father and Nancy Gryce, was a being not to be classed in the same category. Mrs. Medlicott could not divest herself of a vague and uncomfortable notion that Ginevra resembled a lamb being given into the custody of a wolf; yet she felt instinctively that in the lamb's innocence lay her strength, and though not a woman of very refined temperament, she felt the utter impossibility of disturbing it by innuendo or admonition.

Mrs. Medlicott's eyes moistened, and she bent down and kissed the girl's cheek. She was not given to impulses of this kind, and Ginevra, startled into consciousness, returned the caress with a sort of wistful compunction.

"How kind you are!" she said sweetly. "I am sorry if I have seemed impatient sometimes when you have told me of silly things that I had said and done. I think that every one is very good to me. . . . And I shall soon see Brian now,

Ah, Mrs. Medlicott, if Daddy were only alive I should be the happiest girl in all the world."

* * * * * *

Upon the following day Ginevra left her room, and though her arm was kept in a sling, and Cassilis continued in nominal attendance, she joined in the occupations of her companions and disdained the imputation of invalidism.

The days were stifling and moisture-laden; the hotel was noisy, and pervaded by the Anglo-Indian element in the shape of a regiment on its way home; the streets even in sunlight dingy and vile-smelling, with only the indefinable charm of Orientalism to redeem them from squalor; yet to Will Cassilis, Singapore seemed Paradise.

Not so to Mrs. Medlicott. The Messageries boat was late. The cooking at the Hôtel de l'Europe disagreeed with her. Government House was at the time vacant, and the expedition they had planned to Johore, from unforeseen causes, fell through. Australia, in the shape of the Freemans, crushed her with a dead weight of what she was pleased to term vulgarity. She wished to forget that she had been there. And the time passed heavily. There was absolutely nothing to do but collect old china and Indian fallals which might have been purchased in Regent Street; to drive aimlessly along the palm-bordered roads, or to make expeditions to the various places of interest in the town.

These were mostly of Will Cassilis's planning, and of course he joined them, while as was a natural consequence of the quartette, he and Ginevra were frequently thrown upon each other for entertainment.

There was never any lack of conversation between them. Her talk might have been said to resemble one of her Australian creeks, full of glancing shallows merging suddenly into deep and somewhat mysterious pools. It contained too an element of personality, of half-intentional appeal, and of evident wish to please, that bewildered and intoxicated Will, whose experience of women had been circumscribed. When in her presence he was sensible of a vague delicious melancholy—a pleasurable pain. She encouraged him to think of her; but if she possessed any of that latent coquetry which more or less distinguishes all lovable women, never was coquette so unconscious. Her speech flowed on as fearlessly as that of a child, yet at every turn of their intercourse he dis-

covered something for which he had not been prepared. She would discuss abstruse topics with the gravity of a professor, then would suddenly break off into some naïve observation or guileless question, which betrayed alike extreme ignorance of the world, and complete purity of mind.

He made an opportunity of speaking to her of his admiration for Dr. Rolt's works; and his sympathy with the father's theories formed a bond of union with the daughter. She in her turn told him of her solitary up-bringing, of her wild home among the mountains, of the few episodes of interest in her childhood, still, however, suppressing all allusion to her relations with Brian Gilmore.

One afternoon they drove out beyond the town, past the Dohli lines, the scene of Ginevra's first luckless expedition.

Here groups of half-nude Malays stood knee-deep in a muddy stream, banging against flat stones the luckless garments which they were endeavouring to restore to a pristine state of cleanliness.

"God preserve my buttons!" ejaculated Mr. Medlicott devoutly.

They hastily descended at a Chinese booth beneath the palm-trees, and bought some bunches of luscious mangosteens, clusters of perfumy bananas and young iced cocoa-nuts, with which they regaled themselves beneath the whispering mimosa trees in the Botanical Gardens.

Before the impromptu repast was finished, Mr. and Mrs. Freeman bore down upon the party.

"Pa is all abroad in this outlandish place," remarked the Australian lady in a ringing and injured tone. "He says he wishes that he had never left Wooranga; but I always said that I *would* have my trip to Europe, even if I took my own money out of the Bank to pay for it; and I tell Pa that he'll be thankful by-and-by when he takes his seat in the House again, that he has seen something of the world, and knows how other folks manage their business."

Whereupon some discussion anent Chinese emigration and colonial land laws ensued between the great and lesser squatter, which caused the party to divide into twos, and gave Dr. Cassilis a pretext for turning down a side-path with Ginevra.

"I have got some news for you," he began. "We sail to-morrow. Mr. Freeman has heard that the *Djemnah* is in the harbour."

"That is good news," said Ginevra.

"Are you tired of staying in Singapore?"

"Oh no!—it is a very amusing town. All places are interesting to me. But I am anxious to reach England. And then, just think how pleased Mrs. Medlicott will be. What is the first place that we shall touch at?"

"I suppose that will be Galle. It takes five days to get there."

"It is exactly a fortnight since you dragged me out of the lions' den. In three weeks we ought to have become friends. Don't you think so?"

"I feel flattered by your taking that view of the situation."

"Oh no, there is nothing flattering in it. Perhaps I have reasons for wishing our relations towards each other to be something definite. And I can't quite make you out. You look at me occasionally in a way that puzzles me—as if you were studying me. It is just that which makes the difficulty. I am so inexperienced. When we reach Galle you must tell me what opinions you have formed."

"If you were more experienced, it might strike you that I study you because I am anxious to know what opinion *you* have formed of *me*," answered Will gravely.

"You may have that now—for what it is worth," said Ginevra promptly; then added hastily and in some confusion: "No, I will wait till we arrive at Galle. Then I may have something else to tell you—and we will exchange confidences, Dr. Cassilis. But so much I must tell you; mine will be the most important of the two."

"Won't you give me a clue to it now?"

"No; that would set you thinking, and though I like stimulating your expectations I want my communication to be a complete surprise."

He observed with wonder that she was blushing, and felt the prickings of keenly roused curiosity. For a second it dawned across his mind that she meant to tell him she was engaged to be married. But he quickly dismissed the suspicion as incompatible with her extreme youth, the secluded life she had led, and, above all, with his own dawning hopes. It is the nature of man to believe most readily in what he wishes to believe. He had no doubt of himself after this fortnight of close intercourse. Love had roused his enthusiasm, and he could only kneel and worship at the goddess' shrine.

He said to himself that Ginevra's confidence was but some girlish joke. She was young enough to be fond of making a mystery. So he stood and looked at her. Her eyes were drooped. Had they met his, he must inevitably have betrayed his secret. They paused near a cage of lyre birds. Over Ginevra's head an *acacia flamboyant* waved its orange plumes, and beside her was a jasmine bush covered with waxen blossoms. She plucked these one by one and let them fall at her feet. Her attitude was inexpressibly conscious and bewitching. To Cassilis it seemed almost expectant. But he spoke constrainedly. Not for worlds would he ruffle or alarm her.

"*I* am not glad that we are going away to-morrow. When one is happy it is impossible not to dread a change. You puzzle me—and since we are not to understand each other till we reach Galle, I have before me five days of suspense."

"And I, too," replied Ginevra with her tender laugh. "Don't take it too seriously. After all, I have not quite decided to make my particular confidence at Galle. I may keep it till later. And you have made a strange admission. You say that I puzzle you. I have been told that it is a principle with doctors never to allow that they do not understand their patients."

"Nevertheless, I am honest enough to confess that trying to understand you has helped me to a better knowledge of myself."

"Tell me in what way."

"I see that my theories of life only needed a touch to be knocked down."

"And shall you begin again, and make a new plan?"

"If I make a new plan, it will be one which I cannot carry out alone," said Will earnestly.

"I wish you would describe it to me."

"Perhaps I may—later."

"At Galle?"

"At Galle," he repeated, and both laughed with slight embarrassment.

Ginevra moved on to a cage of parrakeets, and began to crumble and scatter between the bars some fragments of biscuit which she had brought.

Suddenly, she half turned and said: "I think that whatever plan of life you made, it would be a wise one. You

ought to have a clear judgment. I dare say that you have often helped people who were perplexed or unhappy. I have read somewhere that the physician is the priest of this century, and I think it must be true."

Will was struck by a faint note of appeal in her voice. "You know," he cried impulsively, "that if you wanted help, I could desire no greater joy than to serve you."

At first Ginevra shook her head and was silent for a moment; then she said hesitatingly: "There is one thing that I should like to ask you. Are there any circumstances under which it would be right for a mother and child to live unknown to each other? I am ignorant of life. I wish to understand. Don't ask me any questions, but tell me as best you can what I wish to know."

"How can I speak positively?" exclaimed Will in deep perplexity. "The ties between mother and child are the most holy—the most binding. Under no circumstances should they be broken unless by coldness, or cruelty—or sin. . . . There might be conditions under which. . . . It is difficult to generalize. I cannot explain my meaning to you."

"Sin!" repeated Ginevra in a low tone; and the same train of thought which had passed through her mind upon the discovery of that scrap of paper, containing Madame Dessollé's address—cherished now among her dearest possessions—again roused a painful consciousness. She blushed suddenly and deeply. "But where there was the true heart's love bringing them into sympathy even when they scarcely knew each other—if the mother had done wrong it would rest with the daughter to condone. They say love is stronger than death. Then love can have little might if it be powerless to wash away sin."

"We know," said Cassilis gravely, "that according to the laws of nature, sin is punished by its own fruits. There are cases—as when a woman has outraged her womanhood—where the alienation of those humanly bound closest, is the inevitable and just penalty for crime."

"Your doctrine is selfish and cruel; it shall not be mine," cried Ginevra passionately. "Nature is not cruel. She bids the heart speak, and I will obey the voice of my heart. Don't let us talk of this again."

She moved away; and till their return to the hotel was silent and thoughtful, avoiding conversation with Will.

CHAPTER V.

ON DECK AT NIGHT.

The *Djemnah* was nearing Galle. From afar, fancy might have scented the spicy odours of Ceylon; and in the dim distance the hazy outline of her coast lay sleeping.

It was the calmest of tropical evenings. The great vessel glided smoothly through the sea. The awnings were furled, and a glorious golden after-glow shed its radiance over sky and ocean. Only the lightest breeze rippled the water and stirred the blonde hair of a little Dutch family who were playing a game of thread-the-ring on deck. Grouped round the children, and merrily assisting in their play, were a number of Sœurs de St. Vincent de Paul, their quaint head-dresses and straight robes contrasting curiously with their bright faces. A little lower down, madame, the wife of a certain superannuated French consul, lay on a bamboo lounge and languidly fanned herself, while she discoursed with M. le Commissaire upon matters gastronomic. Close beside her a group of Frenchmen held an animated conversation, interrupted now and then by shrieks of laughter from the children, and shrill ejaculations from the sisters: "Viens p'tit coco." "Ah voila la grosse affaire!" as a tiny brown hand triumphantly held up the ring; while all these sounds mingled with the calls of the sailors, the quaint babble of Chinese Armas and Indian Ayahs, and the buzz of half a dozen different languages—all that bewildering murmur of life and motion which is to be heard on a great passenger steamer.

Dinner was over. It was the hour of the promenade, and two by two the passengers paced up and down the long deck, paired after a somewhat incongruous fashion. An Eastern Emir in embroidered fez yoked with a Spanish lady whose crimson bernous made a vivid spot of colour against the softly toned sea. A fat Dutch merchant linked to a bright dignified little Frenchwoman with hair dressed *à la Marquise* and clouds of black lace shrouding her ample shoulders. A Parisienne of doubtful type essaying in broken English the subjugation of a lucky digger on his way from Australia to visit the Irish mother in her Tipperary shanty. Two yellow-faced

Anglo-Indians comparing symptoms of liver complaint, followed by their pretty, affected-looking wives, full of tropical airs, and each with an attendant cavalier in the shape of an officer travelling home on furlough. A closely shaved, richly dressed Catholic prelate, with his cross on his breast and his rosary at his side, leaning on the arm of Mr. Medlicott, whose foible it was to cultivate the powers that were, whether of Church or State; and so on through a list interminable, including Dr. Cassilis and Ginevra, who having dropped out of the file were standing together at the stern of the steamer—he with his arms folded, his gaze directed seaward—she, her elbows resting upon the bulwarks, her chin upon her hands, making a charming picture ethereal ized by the soft pink light of the evening.

Since their conversation in the Gardens at Singapore she had made no further allusion, either to the subject of her impulsive inquiry, or to that of her promised confidence. A slight restraint seemed to have crept up between them. He fancied that she had since somewhat avoided his companionship, and remarked in her manner a timid reserve which it had not certainly at first exhibited. Her eyes did not meet his quite so fearlessly; her speech was less frank, and every now and then she relapsed into a fit of silence which was broken with obvious effort.

These signs of dawning consciousness filled Will with trembling delight. Slightly as he had studied women from the lover's point of view, he had done so sufficiently to be aware that mutual embarrassment is the first step towards tacit understanding. He brought all his reasoning powers to bear upon the delicate subject of the *rapprochement* of wooer and maid. He studied it through the medium of French novels and sentimental poetry, much as he might before have meditated upon a biological treatise, though it must be said that he recoiled with a sense of desecration from the idea of applying the coarse doctrines of sensuous scribes to a being so pure as Ginevra.

They had been gaily discussing the scene around them; and now came one of those pauses that were sweet to Will and disquieting to Ginevra. A word, a look, a tone had during the last few hours made her realize the fact that underlying this light talk there flowed a current of melancholy, exciting thought. Their eyes met, and parted quickly.

"Won't you sit down?" said Will. "You have been standing for some time."

She took the chair he offered her. Presently Mr. Medlicott joined them, and lit his cigar, launching in his usual style into benevolent, jocose conversation.

"And what are you thinking of, Miss Ginevra—the letters that you will get at Galle to-morrow, or the chances of our being met at Marseilles? Now I call this a very agreeable sort of life," he continued discursively; "pleasant society, variety of conversation, and good feeding. I'll tell you what it is, Cassilis, if you and I have to cross the equator again, this is our line. I hear that Gilmore has had a wretched journey through America."

"Gilmore!" echoed Cassilis with a start. "Ah! I forgot for the moment that you had met him so lately, and that he had left Australia."

"Oh he does not do me credit," said Mr. Medlicott, shaking his head. "He is a bad advertisement for the Colonies. As for me, I really thought of applying to the Government for a percentage on all the new chums I have sent out. I am not sure though that Gilmore hasn't taken *something* worth having out of Australia. What do *you* say, Ginevra?"

Will looked up hastily, and saw that Ginevra coloured, but that she was prone to do upon small provocation. She laughed a little curiously, and the subject dropped save from Will's mind. Mr. Medlicott's insinuation grated upon him in an unaccountable manner. The feeling was more complex than jealousy, for the idea of any close relations between Ginevra and Gilmore did not occur to him as in the least degree probable. Brian, when Cassilis had last seen him, had been on the point of dissolving his connection with the unfortunate lady to whom allusion has been made. Will had entertained chivalrous notions on this matter, and had plainly told his cousin that he was committing a moral crime in forsaking his unhappy companion. There had been certain arrangements in regard to one of the children which Will had assisted in carrying out. It was the association of ideas that was at this moment so distasteful.

Night was falling; and the deck had gradually cleared. The last refractory child had been carried down the companion-ladder; the gentlemen had mostly gone to the *fumoir*, and the Sisters were collecting their knitting-needles and

books of devotion, and bidding a cheery *Bon soir* to the few who remained above.

"I must go and look after the missus," said Mr. Medlicott, rising. "She has got the neuralgia, and is rather low this evening. Will you come down, Ginevra; I am told that there is to be some music."

"All the more reason for remaining on deck," said Will decidedly. "The heat of the salon is unbearable."

Ginevra declared that she preferred to stay upstairs, especially if Monsieur Toussaint were going to sing.

Monsieur Toussaint was a professional tenor, so devoted to his art that he found it impossible even in the face of prudence and a long sea voyage to refrain from occasionally practising it. He was fat, good-natured, dramatic, and as there were several melo-maniacs on board, his enthusiasm nightly turned the salon into a concert-room.

Ginevra and Cassilis were left alone. He insisted upon throwing a light shawl over her shoulders, rather from the longing which seized him to bend closer to her, to touch her dress, her arm, than because on that warm dry evening a wrap was necessary. Now there floated up from the salon the plaintive melody of the violin accompanying a woman's voice in some melancholy German air. What magic lies in the bow wielded by a deft hand! What spell, to set sensitive nerves quivering, and tender chords vibrating, and old memories whispering, in that mood, half bliss, half pain, which is yet almost the highest joy which earth can yield!

The violinist ceased. The contralto tones were hushed. There was a pause, a murmur, a silence, and then the pathetic notes of Orpheus' song in Gluck's opera, "*Che faro senza Eurydice*," stole up into the night.

It seemed to Cassilis that the mournful wail, rising now in passionate crescendo, was the voice of his own yearnings. His secret was no longer his own. The music was speaking for him—pleading his love. . . . And Ginevra heard and understood. . . . By her sudden tremor—by the manner in which at first, by soft gradations, she seemed to draw nearer to his side; and then to shrink away from the contact—by the sound of her deep-drawn sigh, he knew that for a moment their souls were in harmony. Love perfected cannot exist without the element of physical attraction; but there is a moral and mental affinity, differing widely from reciprocal

passion, yet hardly less potent, which under exciting conditions may bring the passionate, and the passive into a state of spiritual *rapport*.

At this moment it was borne in upon Ginevra that Will loved her. . . . And in one of those curious emotional phases, common to highly wrought women, her impulses swayed towards him, and love for Brian seemed at the moment merged in the bond of sympathy that united her to Will. Like a vision, it was revealed to her that the two destinies had touched too late, and that had she not recognized in Brian her heart's spouse, that heart must have been given to Will.

The intuition lasted but a second. Shame followed, scourging her for the momentary infidelity. Anger, pity, deep pain, and a strange, inconsistent sense of satisfaction blended together in her being. . . . And the music still rang out wild, imploring—and Will's eyes glowed upon hers in the dimness. The gliding motion of the steamer; the solitude of sky which shut them in—the solemn sea—all deepened the spell.

Involuntarily Will put forth his hand; it touched and clasped hers. When the cry "Eurydice, Eurydice!" pierced their souls, his grasp tightened, and a quiver seemed to pass from his frame to hers. But the brief intoxication turned to shuddering recoil. Ginevra wrenched her fingers from his hold, and, rising, moved slowly away.

Will rose too; his agitation had subsided, leaving only solitude and intense longing. He trembled lest he had revealed his love too suddenly.

"Oh, forgive me. I did not mean to tell you yet; we have been together too short a time. But how could I help feeling for you as I do? It came to me almost the first moment that we met. And now you know everything. . . . You have your wish. . . . You have made me believe in love—for I love *you*."

Ginevra was leaning upon the bulwarks. Her face was hidden by her hands.

"Hush!" she said brokenly. "You ought not to speak to me in this way. I cannot—I have been blind—I did not know. And now—— Oh, I am sorry, I am sorry; I ought to have told you at first."

"What ought you to have told me?" asked Will in a tone of sharp entreaty. "Is there any reason why I should not love you?"

"There is—I——" Ginevra began bravely, then hesitated, and a sob choked her words. At that moment her guardian's voice sounded upon deck.

"Ginevra, where are you? Mrs. Medlicott has given me orders to bring you down. She says that Dr. Cassilis is not old enough to take care of you."

"I am coming," replied Ginevra with forced composure.

"Will you not give me an answer?" whispered Cassilis in agitated tones. "One word only. Say that I may hope."

"No," said Ginevra, "I cannot. To-morrow you shall understand. I said that I would tell you—at Galle. To-night I am too wretched."

She moved forward and took Mr. Medlicott's arm. Was this coquetry? No. As she passed him Will saw by her face how deeply she was moved. He was left alone upon deck. The bell rang in the watch, and sounded to his excited fancy like a knell. He heard Ginevra say to her guardian: "I should like to go to my cabin."

"So early! What, are you ill? This will never do."

"I am tired and cold—that is all.

"Cold! with the thermometer at ninety degrees. Nonsense. There's some coffee in the salon: it will warm you, and Monsieur Toussaint is going to sing again presently."

Will remained above, in the darkness and solitude. For several minutes he paced up and down, hardly conscious of what he was doing. What was the meaning of this mystery? Had he been mistaken? Did she not love him? Why then had her hand yielded itself so confidingly to his? . . . Why . . .

The music had begun again. Some one was playing airs from the Kinderscenen of Schumann, but the plaintive melody of *Der Dichter spricht* was almost drowned in the noise of talk and laughter. Two Frenchmen were quarrelling over *écarté*. Mrs. Freeman was addressing a shrill remonstrance to her lord, who had already mixed his second glass of toddy. A young Australian squatter was, to quote Mr. Trollope, *blowing* vigorously. Will caught detached words.

"The best racecourse in the world. Ascot, Goodwood, the Derby—not one of 'em can lick us in Melbourne. We time our horses by electricity, we run 'em by electricity, we do everything by electricity."

Oh what a maddening mockery life seemed! Will stood

by the skylight and gazed down. Ginevra was there, sitting upon a side-bench, her tender profile in relief against the crimson-panelled wall. How young, how guileless—how inexpressibly sad she looked! She grieved for him. It was impossible that she could be indifferent.

"Ginevra. Oh my heart's darling!" murmured poor Will. He watched her leave the salon, and knew that he should have no further opportunity for speech with her that evening.

But he did not know that the pillows of her berth were wet with tears, as during the night-watches she murmured Brian's name; and it was not till her spirit had in dreams joined that of her absent lover, and had implored forgiveness for the involuntary wrong she had committed, that peace visited her aching heart.

CHAPTER VI.

"IT IS YOUR COUSIN."

THE *Djemnah* was slowly steaming into Galle harbour.

It was early in the afternoon, and most of the passengers were on deck taking their first view of this picturesque old town, with its white colonnaded buildings, and low-roofed bungalows, embedded, as it were, in groves of palms, and surrounded by belts of rich tropical vegetation. Already a fleet of catamarans had put forth from the pier, and as soon as the steamer had lowered her anchor the air resounded with the screams of native dealers who were besieging the companion-ladder. Several large vessels, with flags flying or steam slowly getting up, lay in the bay. The scorching glare was tempered only by the blue above and below. A grateful breeze ruffled the water, and sent the spray aloft as the waves dashed against a long line of breakers which on one side of the port bristled into the sea, while on the other the surf broke crisply upon a sandy shore.

"If we mean to drive to Wok Walla and back before sunset, we ought to be putting off at once," said Mr. Medlicott cheerfully. "Cassilis, you will join us, of course?"

"Willingly, and as coaling will be going on, I engage you

all to be my guests for dinner at the hotel. We will row back to the steamer at night," said Will, with a feverish gaiety unlike his usual manner.

"It has been my rule through life never to refuse a good invitation," replied Mr. Medlicott. "They don't do one badly at the Oriental. Duchess, I wish you would see what has become of Ginevra. I once spent a fortnight here," he added, winking audaciously at Will when Mrs. Medlicott's back was turned. "Never was so amused in my life. Fell in with Lord Monty Belton and Miladi *pro tem.* The most remarkably vivacious specimen I ever came across. But we don't mention Galle when I go to shoot in Norfolk and take Lady Monty in to dinner."

Will turned away with a sensation of disgust. At that moment Ginevra ascended the staircase. It was her first appearance that morning. She was about as pale as the white dress for which, during the extreme heat of the last few days, she had exchanged her heavy black gown. In this simple costume, the childishness of her face and form struck Will with new force, and brought him some comfort. Surely no exciting or tragic experience could have entered into her lot. She looked too young, too innocent, to have tasted the rapture or bitterness of love.

"Well, Miss Ginevra! And I hope you feel better," said Mr. Medlicott. "We will call at the Post-office the first thing when we get on shore, and I don't doubt that we shall find some medicine there to raise your spirits."

Ginevra blushed deeply. For an instant her eyes met those of Will as she bade him good morning. Her timid glance seemed to implore his pity and forgiveness. But there was no opportunity for speech, either then or when they had taken their places in the narrow upright catamaran with its quaint outrigger, in which they were rowed to shore.

As they walked to the Post-office a crowd of Cingalese dealers, violently jabbering and gesticulating, closed in round them. Mrs. Medlicott, in the emergency forgetful of her dignity, exhausted the resources of her aboriginal vocabulary in endeavouring to signify her refusal of the gems which were pressed upon her, first at a thousand rupees, finally at one.

"Ba'al, Ba'al!" she cried distractedly.

"Explain, my dear Will, that we don't live far from

Birmingham," said Mr. Medlicott, taking his wife under his protection.

Cassilis placed Ginevra's hand upon his arm, and piloted her through the crush. He dared not speak here, yet this silent suspense was agony.

There were no letters, and his spirits rose. Perhaps, after all, Mr. Medlicott's joking remark had meant nothing. Presently they got into a carriage and were driven away from the town.

The road led through cocoa-nut plantations and jungle, where creepers twined round the straight palm-stems, and orchids hung like spotted butterflies, and strange-hued flowers bloomed among the rank undergrowth—past bungalows overshadowed by thick-stemmed, large-leaved trees, native shanties, and paddy fields through which tiny streamlets trickled beneath overhanging ferns and arums; while a crowd of naked black imps ran behind the carriage, importuning for alms and thrusting great bunches of jasmine and hibiscus into the ladies' laps.

The afternoon had begun to wane when they reached the top of Wok Walla. A mulatto waitress brought out lemonade and fruit from the bungalow, and they sat down on the brow of the hill, and looked over the glorious stretch of country which spread around and below them. There were blue mountains in the far distance; and like a panorama below them, undulating rises clothed with cinnamon woods where light and dark green blended with the tender rose of young shoots; coffee plantations and virgin forest; valleys deep and shadowy, and through all, the river winding like an irregular band of blue, with little flashes of colour here and there, where scarlet-breasted cranes preened themselves upon its banks.

Presently, some of the other passengers arrived, and a large party collected for the descent. Now could he but seize it! Will's opportunity presented itself. He clung persistently to Ginevra's side, but she, shrinking from baring her heart 'mid so many jarring sounds, held Mr. Medlicott's arm firmly and walked on, white and mournful. Will could endure no more, but excusing himself on the plea of ordering dinner, joined company with the Commissaire and the "lucky digger" and went on in advance.

They drove home along the sea-shore through the gathering

dusk, while fire-flies flitted among the tangle, and the violet after-glow shining through the palm-stems, transfigured land and sea.

Cassilis reached the Oriental before the Medlicotts, and was waiting to help them from the carriage.

"Now," he said in his tone of forced geniality, "we are going to test the resources of the hotel. Mrs. Medlicott, I have done my best. The champagne is being iced; the fruit is in the refrigerator, and I have ordered a table to be laid in the breeziest window."

There were a good many people in the dining-room. Little groups were scattered here and there at round tables, chattering and quaffing iced drinks. Windows and doors were wide open; the airy garments, waving punkah, and black waiters, gave an odd tropical air to the place. Many eyes were turned towards the new-comers. Mr. Medlicott was in his most humorous vein, and began to tell amusing anecdotes of his experiences in England and the Antipodes, not without mental reference to the audience of strangers he was entertaining. He liked to pose under all circumstances. An Indian snake-charmer, with his cobra in a basket before him, was playing his melancholy instrument in a corner of the verandah. There was a sort of fascination in the weird sound and graceful writhings of the hooded reptile that deepened Ginevra's sense of bewilderment. Was it all some strange melodrama which she was witnessing; and were there no beating hearts and throbbing pulses underlying the light mirth?

"I *must* speak to you," whispered Cassilis as they left the table.

In the verandah Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott met some acquaintances outward bound, and were soon deep in English talk. Cassilis took advantage of a momentary pause to say—

"Mrs. Medlicott, Miss Rolt has a headache, and I think it would do her good to escape for a little time from this heat and noise. Will you let me take her for a stroll towards the beach? I will bring her back when she is tired."

Mrs. Medlicott, pausing in an animated relation of the movements of Lord and Lady Silverdene, nodded assent; and Will offered Ginevra his arm.

The night was moonless, but stars shone brightly overhead, and the many lights scattered about the bay might have been reflections from above. Ginevra and Cassilis

walked in silence away from the hotel and turned into a dusky unfrequented path. Faint aromatic odours floated over them, seeming to envelop them in a cloud of fragrant incense; and there were no sounds save the murmur of insects, the wind's rustle through the bread-fruit trees, and the plash of waves upon the beach.

Suddenly Cassilis paused, and took both her hands in his. "Ginevra!" he exclaimed, "I can bear this no longer. The day has been torture to me. Have I deserved that you should shun me so persistently? You know that I love you, and that my dearest wish is to make you my wife. At least you can bid me either hope or despair. I beseech you speak, and put an end to my suspense."

"I wanted to say—last night—that you must not hope," Ginevra answered very low, not lifting her eyes, but clinging to his hands as though she would fain claim his pity. "Why do you love me?" she went on, her voice gaining strength. "You have only known me a few days. You must be mistaken in me to have fancied—might it not end now, and last night be forgotten?"

"You speak like a woman," replied Will bitterly. "Is love measured by days? There can never be an end. I love you, and I shall love you till I die."

Ginevra withdrew her hands, and was silent. Had not Brian spoken in like manner? It was true. Love is governed by fixed laws, and not by will.

"You have seemed to take pleasure in my companionship," said Cassilis. "I have fancied that in your manner there was at times something almost of tenderness. Was I deceived?"

Ginevra shook her head.

"You do like me, then?"

"Oh very much—indeed I do," she answered earnestly.

"Of course it is impossible that you can care for me—as I wish—so soon. But why should it be always an impossibility?" (Suddenly), "Have you promised to marry any other man?"

"Yes: I have promised."

"Is it some one whom you love?"

"Some one whom I love, with all my heart and soul. . . . Now you will understand. I am very miserable: it hurts me to cause you pain. You have been so good to me; and if I seemed to like you, it was quite true." She paused, waiting

for him to speak; but for some moments there was dead silence. She could not meet his eyes, which were fixed despairingly upon her face.

"I might have guessed this," he said at length. "Yesterday the thought *did* flash across my mind, but it seemed unnatural that one so young, so childlike, should have the feelings and experience of a woman. This, then, is the confidence which you promised to make me when we reached Galle. It would have been kinder—more honourable—if you had told me your secret sooner. We are in Galle; and we understand each other—too late. . . . Ah, no!" he continued passionately; "I do *not* understand you. While I believed you to be the soul of frankness, you were in reality acting the part of a coquette. What object but one could you have had in making a mystery of your engagement? I have a right to be angry. You have been cruel. You have been false."

Ginevra stood wide-eyed and motionless, pierced by his upbraiding. Her heart ached with infinite pity. Life and love seemed to her so momentous that she could not accept his words at less than their fullest meaning. She was racked by the despairing remorse which a tender woman might well feel at the knowledge that she had unwillingly destroyed another's happiness. But her bosom heaved under the lash of his injustice.

"You misjudge me completely. Do you not know that to love deeply can only teach one to reverence love in others—when one sees it; but it is love which makes one blind? I am ignorant—thoughtless; but I am not false—not cruel. How could I know? How could I guess? If you can believe me wicked I will not try to justify myself. A woman who takes pleasure in inflicting pain does not deserve to be loved—does not deserve to live. . . ."

Ginevra's voice broke: she turned away, wounded pride and a deeper, more unselfish feeling, struggling with each other. At last she added impulsively, "You have not the right to be angry. I had no thought of being false—to him—to you—to my own heart. You *must* feel that. Almost any pain would be easier to me to bear than that of knowing that I had injured one who was—whom I esteemed."

"Oh forgive me!" cried Will impetuously, again taking her hands within his. "Forget my cowardly reproaches. They were wrung from me by disappointment. I despise

myself for having uttered them. In my heart I know you to be incapable of untruth or disloyalty. . . . But, Ginevra, I love you. . . ." Will paused, and then repeated the words in low lingering tones, as though it were sweet to him to pronounce them: "I love you. It is the one supreme fact which makes my existence what it is. Had I met you as a married woman, I must still have loved you; only I should never have told you so. Do you not see? This is what makes the blow so bitter. I had allowed myself to hope. . . . But I am not a child, to groan after a thrashing. There is an end of it—as regards present hope. You said that you esteemed me, that you liked me; at least, then, I have a claim on your regard. Do not turn away from me; let us talk it all out. It may be painful, but it will be best. I don't quite understand how this can have happened to you. You are so young, your life has been so shut out from the world. Tell me; is this man whom you love an Australian? No; that can hardly be, or you would not be on your way to England without him. Is he an Englishman? What is his name?"

"He is an Englishman," answered Ginevra. She paused for a moment, then added, falteringly, "It is your cousin—Brian Gilmore."

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE PALM-TREES.

THERE was a long silence. Since Will's avowal Ginevra had instinctively felt that the pain of knowing that his cousin had won her love, would be greater than if she could tell him that a stranger was to become her husband. She dared not look towards him, but her hands were released suddenly; and she knew that he had turned away from her. She spoke at last, hurriedly, and in a voice broken by agitation.

"It happened only a short time ago. We met first in Leichardt's Town, and afterwards we were together at Birrali. It was as though we had been fated to come together. His going or staying rested upon a mere chance—but he stayed. And he chose me, before all the women he had known . . . and I—how could I help loving him?" . . . She paused,

stung by the fear lest she had wounded him more deeply. . . . "And I wanted you to like me, because you were his friend and relation. That was why I forbade Mr. Medlicott to tell you at first that I was engaged. If you had been a stranger I should have felt differently. It was a whim—partly because I was a little shy of Brian's people, and partly because you interested me, and I wished that we should meet, as it were, on neutral ground. I intended to tell you, when we were a little way on the voyage, that I was going to be your cousin. It amused me to think how surprised and perhaps pleased you would be. That was what I meant when I said that I should have something to confide in you at Galle. . . . How could I guess what was in your mind? It is true that I have been a little troubled sometimes since we left Singapore. I don't want to hide anything from you. It arose from something in your voice—your manner—I hardly know what. . . . But then I used to tell myself that I was vain and foolish, and fancied things because I had no knowledge of how men talked to girls. Of course I had read of social life, and flirtation—and—but that was all I knew. . . . Then, last night, it came so suddenly. The music seemed speaking to me. I was in a dream. . . . And while you held my hand, I felt that I was wicked—false. I had been thinking of Brian, and you were mingled with him in my mind—you will not understand; it is difficult to express myself. And, afterwards, there was the pain—the longing to spare you. But it was too late; and thus all my life I must have the misery of knowing what I have done to you."

The vibration of sorrow in Ginevra's voice recalled Will from an abyss of anger, disgust, despair.

"Oh, Ginevra, say no more. Do you not know that in my thoughts I must always hold you best, purest, and sweetest? Let me bear any suffering rather than that of feeling that I am the cause of unhappiness to you. Will it comfort you if I tell you what is indeed the truth, that were it possible to do so, I would not blot out the remembrance of this month? Knowing you has brought me pain, but it has also brought me great joy. . . . The bitterness of the sting lies in the thought that it is Brian Gilmore who has won you." Will's voice rose in passionate, almost scornful protest. "Fate, so cruel to some, is kind to others less worthy. How did he dare take you to his heart—*you—you!* . . ."

He moved on a few paces; and while she remained mute and frightened, stood with his back to her, leaning against the trunk of a palm, and looking out seaward. After a few moments he faced her again and spoke in calmer tones.

"Bear with me; I am hardly master of myself. It is so short a time since I first saw you, and yet all my life seems to have been gathered into these days, ah me! so easily numbered. That is the penalty which is paid for love. It is useless to try and disguise from you that I suffer; and you are too essentially sweet and true not to suffer with me. You see that if I wronged your nature, it was but for a moment. At least, in loving you I have learned that an ideal may be realized. This is a conviction worth its price of pain. But I think that you might have cared for me, Ginevra, had I been the first. . . . Yes, I think you might have cared for me," he repeated wistfully; "say that it is possible."

"How can I answer you?" said Ginevra, faltering. "To say so would be disloyalty, and you must know that my whole heart——"

She paused. Her soul revolted against Cassilis's suggestion, yet admitted a vague sense of guilt. It was impossible even for a moment to suppress the fact of Gilmore's predominance in her mental universe; yet there crept into it, like the phantom of her deeper love, this sympathetic affinity with Will. It was no more; it never could be more, but of its nature it was true and powerful.

"Oh, I do care for you," she exclaimed impulsively. "You are a good man. I feel certain that you are unselfish and true. I wish that you were my brother."

"Let me stand to you—for this evening at least—in the relation of a brother; that is what at the present moment I most wish," said Will solemnly. "Let me feel that however frankly and unconventionally I may speak to you, you will not misjudge me, or suspect me of any motive but deep interest in your happiness. Tell me that you trust me so far."

"Yes. I trust you," answered Ginevra.

"Thank you. I want to speak to you about Brian. The only right which I have to do so lies in the fact of your youth and lonely position, and in my knowledge of him. . . . There are some things," continued Will, hesitating slightly, "which form the landmarks as it were of one's faith and honour, but which it is very difficult to convey in words to a girl like you.

For instance, one might know of circumstances in the life of a man which, while hardly injuring him in the estimation of the world, would make the thought of his marriage with a sister—or a woman dear to one—inexpressibly repugnant."

Will watched Ginevra eagerly, as though hoping she would make some gesture of comprehension; but she stood silent and with eyes downcast.

"It has shocked me to hear that you are engaged to Brian Gilmore, for reasons quite apart from my own disappointed hope. Not because I am jealous, as people sometimes are of their relations, or because I fear a rupture of our former intimacy. We are cousins, and we once were close friends, but that is not the case now. I have known him since I was a boy: he is older than I am—at one time he was the object of my enthusiastic admiration. Even now I think that I understand him as well as a nature so full of complex impulses can be understood. I have been behind the scenes under circumstances in events which have exercised the most powerful influence upon his life. Ten or twelve years ago, he seemed to me full of grand capabilities. That belief has gone. His heart has been worn out by purposeless passions. Self-indulgence has ruined his nature. He can never again give what is worthy of a true woman's acceptance. Be angry with me"—for Ginevra's head had been suddenly uplifted, and her eyes had flashed at him a glance of indignation, and faith in the absent, almost sublime. "Be angry!—how can I expect anything else?—but remember your promise and listen to the end. To you life is a poem full of grandeur and beauty and sweet aims and pure hopes. I have often heard Brian say that existence is only worth the number of sensations which can be crowded into its span. It was at one time his despair that he could not lose himself, as it were, in intense passion for a woman. He wished only to experience the *sensation;* he had no longing after the higher lasting feeling. . . . And he has loved after his fashion, and has forgotten. If false to one trust, why not false to another? Oh, is not my meaning clear to you? This is not the man to whom you should give such treasures as you have to bestow."

"You have no right; no one in this world has any right, to decide between his love—his worthiness and mine," cried Ginevra passionately. "You must understand but little of love, if you imagine that it can be meted out according to

value, or that once given there can be any doubt, any question—I was wrong to let you speak, I will hear no more."

"Is this then all your trust?" said Will bitterly. "Already you are indignant. Already you condemn me as treacherous, self-serving. But what does it matter how you think of me, if only you are brought to comprehend your position, to analyze your own heart? You are too young, too sensitive, too pure to be sacrificed to this Moloch of civilization—marriage in which a woman is led blindfold to the altar, her husband's past the fire which destroys her life. I *will* speak, not for myself, not to cry down another that I may be exalted. Am *I* worthy of you? No, a thousand times. But at least I could woo you honestly. At least I have not forsaken those whom I—who were betrayed and helpless. Brian Gilmore is not fit to be your husband. There are—there were others who have the strongest claims upon him."

Will had begun calmly: he ended with passionate vehemence. Pressed by his rushing thoughts, he dared not utter, yet longed with all his soul to convey, the reason for this sickening revulsion which overpowered him. Brian—Ginevra. There seemed to him something horrible and sacrilegious in the conjunction of names. The union of a vestal with a satyr could not have appeared more unnatural than marriage between these two.

An involuntary movement upon Ginevra's part had arrested him. She stretched out her arm with an imperative gesture.

"Stay," she said very low. "You have told me that there are others who have claims upon him. I do not know what you mean. I do not even know whether to believe you sincere—yes, I do believe that—but I am sure that you are mistaken. Do you think my love, my confidence, are to be shaken at a word? You mean kindly, perhaps, but you are in error; you say what I can hardly pardon. There can be no claim upon him, unless it be that of a woman whom he loves better than he loves me. And if that is so, he is free. You have implied that he cannot woo me honestly—I will ask him that question whether it is so or not. But do not think that I insult him by any doubt. I will ask him because I owe you belief in your sincerity, and I tell you so because I wish to hear no more."

"Yes," exclaimed Will, laying his hand upon her arm, and detaining her as she would have turned from him. "There

is still something more which you must hear. Go to Gilmore. Look into his face with your sweet honest eyes. Force his eyes to meet yours.' Say to him, if you choose, that Will Cassilis told you of claims upon him which he has no right to conceal from the woman he wishes to marry. Challenge him to acknowledge the truth. He will be base indeed if he can lie to you. And then when he has answered you, question your own heart. Ask yourself whether you love *him*, or your conception of him. Ask yourself whether you can indeed face his past without fear, and the future without shuddering. Then at least you will not have rushed ignorantly upon your fate."

The torrent of Will's words rushed over Ginevra's mind, without loosing the bonds of her faith. Her intelligence received less distinctly the impression that Will was accusing Brian, than that he himself was most unselfishly in earnest in his solicitude for her.

"Oh how poorly you understand me!" she said, with a pathos that pierced Will's soul. "When one loves it is as though light had suddenly flooded all one's existence. There is no need to grope among conjectures, or to imagine what may or may not be possible. Why should I sift my feelings, why should I try to wrong him and myself by distrust, because, as you have said truly, I do not know the world? That is nothing to me. *He* is my world. He is sun, light, air, to me. He is my very self. I am never in thought absent from him for a moment. Is not this love? Is not this everything? And if one loves in such a manner, of what consequence is it whether one receives an exact equivalent for what is given. It is degrading to let such a thought enter one's mind. . . . Now, you *must* know that it is of no use to bid me doubt, no use to talk to me of Brian's past; am I not certain that he loves me?—and what do I care for his past, when he is mine, and the present and the future are mine? . . ."

Again Ginevra's voice broke. A wave of despair swept Will's soul. Impassioned as her words were, they fell upon him like lumps of ice, checking all further utterance. He must be silent, relying, with what comfort it could bring him, upon *her* vague promise of appeal to Brian's truth and honour, and upon the impulses towards good which might lie slumbering in his cousin's nature.

The thought of writing to or seeing Gilmore—of imploring Mr. Medlicott's interference—flashed through his mind; but his love for Ginevra seemed to render the one course impossible, and any intention regarding the other was nullified by the reflection that Mr. Medlicott must be acquainted with all these facts, and that, judging from his own coarse, practical stand-point, he saw in them no obstacle to a marriage in which his ward's heart was concerned, and which in all worldly respects was highly suitable.

Will groaned inwardly in dreary helplessness. All sense of personal misery and loss was merged in painful anticipation of Ginevra's future, of which his imagination prefigured swiftly passing images of disillusionment and despair.

At last he said, in a voice of which the sadness moved her to new pity—

"You are perhaps right. It is not for me to speak. All that I know of love is what you have taught me. . . . And I must stand apart, and watch you treading a difficult path, knowing that I have no power to help you. . . ."

"Oh forgive me," murmured Ginevra; "I have been unjust to you."

"No. Do not allow that thought to trouble you. Only let me implore you once more to appeal to Brian for the truth. . . . And then if you are in trouble or perplexity and need help which your guardians cannot give, will you turn to me?"

"Yes," said Ginevra unreservedly. "If I should need help I promise to ask it of you."

"Now I know that you do not misjudge me—that you have faith in me—I am content."

"I would do anything," said Ginevra like a penitent child —"to make amends."

"Amends! Oh, that is not the question."

"Life is difficult," said Ginevra, reverting to his former words, and speaking low and hesitatingly. "It is hard to know whither the paths we choose to walk in will lead us; and on all sides there are mysteries and troubles. Oh!" she added in a little passionate burst of emotion, "if the dead could return but for one hour and make plain what is hidden —if I could speak to my mother! . . ."

"My poor child," exclaimed Will with all the fervency of unselfish pity, "you have never known your mother."

"It will be all clear by-and-by—when I reach England," Ginevra continued. "I am waiting for that. Then I shall know. . . ." She broke down, shaken by sobs.

He placed her hand within his arm, and softly tried to soothe her. "You are worn out; you will be ill. This strain has been too much for you. We will go back to the steamer. I have been cruel to you. I ought not to have agitated you."

They walked on, still in darkness; but before them were the lights; and the voices in the verandah of the hotel had become audible. Will paused, and then deliberately turned back for a pace or two, stopping under the shadow of a clump of palms.

"We have still more than three weeks to spend together," he said.

"Yes," replied Ginevra.

"It is too late now for me to remain behind here. If you wish it, I will leave the *Djemnah* at Aden and wait there for another steamer."

"No, no! Why should you do that?"

"I thought it would spare you embarrassment," said Will simply; "unless indeed we might be so frank to each other as to do away with any doubt of that kind. I have placed you in an unpleasant position," he went on. "I ought to have considered that before. I had not meant to speak so soon but—you know how that has been. I don't wish to go away. It is sweet to me to be near you. If you will say that I may remain, I will promise to keep guard over every word and look. May it be so?"

"I wish you to stay with us," said Ginevra.

"Thank you. I won't abuse your trust. And now, before we go in, may I say a few words—the last of this kind? I want to tell you that I shall never give you up in my heart. If anything—if you should not marry Brian, I will come to you and ask you again to be my wife. . . . It will make no difference to me whether or not we are ever anything more to each other than now. I shall love you till I die, and I will never marry another woman. . . . I don't want you to think," he went on, with little breaks here and there, but speaking sweetly and gravely, "that my life is going to be a failure because I am disappointed, and because, till you are married, I shall have before me a hope that may be only an

illusion. My work has always seemed to me the noblest work in the world, and I shall go on doing it, perhaps all the better because I shall have a deep sympathy with one side of human nature that I have never understood till now. . . . And, Ginevra, it must be something for a woman to be able to say in her heart, 'I am a man's ideal of womanhood, and it is my duty to hold myself fair and pure for the sake of what he reverences in me.' . . . And so you will know that if ever you need a friend, I am ready to serve you with my life. And if you should ever say to yourself, 'He has forgotten; he has changed,' remember what I tell you now: it is an old saying among us, that the Cassilis's never change to the women they have once loved. You will think of this. To-night the veil has been lifted between your heart and mine. To-morrow it will have fallen again, and we shall be no more to each other than fellow-travellers—friends—not close friends in appearance, I could not bear that yet. . . . And at Naples I will leave you. To see your meeting with Brian would be too painful. I must abide the issue. What time has been spoken of for your marriage?"

"A long time hence. It cannot be for six months."

"Six months," he repeated with a sigh of relief. "Before they have passed you may have come to understand what I have wanted to convey, and your instinct will guide you to what is best and happiest for you. You will be at Champneys with the Medlicotts. I will try to avoid you—till afterwards—till I know how it is going to end. And now good-bye."

He looked at her earnestly for a moment, then raised her hand to his lips. It was the sign of his renunciation. There was nothing more to be said. Life must be taken up from a new level—that was all. They walked back in silence to the hotel.

The Medlicotts were still in the verandah. Will interposed his own figure between Ginevra and the light, and took up the difficult part he had set himself to play.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Medlicott, that Miss Rolt's headache is not much better," he said in a voice which he strove to make indifferent. "You see, I still consider her a patient, and have advised her to go on board and try if possible to sleep while we are in smooth water. I think the coaling must be over by this time; it is getting late. I hear that we are to get under way the first thing in the morning."

"A delightful little break in the monotony of our voyage," said Mr. Medlicott impressively, as they were rowed back to the steamer. "You did us capitally, Cassilis. I respect a man who can judiciously order a dinner for four. It requires some art."

CHAPTER VIII.

WILL'S PROTEST.

GINEVRA did not rise the next morning. She felt languid and mentally bruised, and shrank from a meeting with Cassilis under the new conditions which their relations had assumed.

After breakfast Mrs. Medlicott entered with a little bundle of Tauchnitz volumes in her hands.

"Dr. Cassilis has sent you these, and he thinks you had better stay in your cabin, for it is extremely hot upon deck. My dear, he is very attentive, and it is really a comfort to feel that in case of illness there is an English doctor on board; I could never feel any confidence in Frenchmen. He asked me a great many questions about you this morning, and spoke of your engagement—not very cordially, I must say. I am glad that you have told him. I meant to have said something about it to you to-day. It places matters upon a much safer footing. When a girl is engaged I consider it quite unfair to make a mystery. As soon as my daughters had said 'Yes,' I insisted upon affairs being made public. Not that Will Cassilis is a marrying man; he has never seemed to care much about ladies' society. Doctoring was always his craze. I must say that I wonder his father, who is a rich man, did not oppose Will's choice of a profession."

So Mrs. Medlicott discursively chatted, while Ginevra turned a pale face upon her pillow.

"Mrs. Medlicott," she said, with perceptible hesitation, "am I very young to be married?"

Mrs. Medlicott paused for a moment, considering the subject from a general point of view. "When people are poor," she began dogmatically, "a girl can't commit a greater mistake than to marry young. That's what I said to my daughter

Jennie when she wanted to tie herself to a poor parson. I did it, so that I ought to know; but then that was in Australia, and things are different there. There is not so much worry over housekeeping, and a lady can make the puddings without being thought peculiar; and as for children, like the families of the Patriarchs they need only be given a few sheep to start them in life. But in your case, Ginevra, I say the earlier the better. I should just be glad, child," she added with a little womanly thrill, "if you knew a little more of the world."

"I am getting tired of hearing that phrase," said Ginevra. "If one is happy, what does it matter about outside things?"

"Nothing, provided that you can live with your eyes shut," rejoined Mrs. Medlicott tartly. "And the first thing one learns when they are opened is to close them again. It doesn't answer to expect romantic impossibilities—from men especially. No one could have a better husband than I have. You observe how devoted Mr. Medlicott is to me, yet I am quite aware that I have not filled up all the gaps in his life."

"Is that the only reason?" said Ginevra indifferently. She thought of Gilmore's vague attempt at confession on the hill-side at Birrali. No. She did not wish to know more. The past might take care of itself; the present was sufficient for her; and as for the future, she had no fear that Brian would stray from her side. She turned aside and took up the book that Will had sent her.

When Mrs. Medlicott had left the cabin she began to read. The work was "Daniel Deronda;" it had been chosen not without premeditation. But it made no great appeal to Ginevra's heart or understanding. What sympathy could she feel with Gwendolen's tragic struggles and Grandcourt's cold egotism? The episode of Mrs. Glasher revolted, and set her wondering a little, that was all.

* * * * * *

Rough weather set in soon after the *Djemnah* had left Galle; and except in the crowded salon, for several days Ginevra saw nothing of Will. When the sea became calm, so that they could again remain upon deck during the greater part of the day, both seemed to have resumed their normal attitude. Ginevra was perhaps a little more dreamy, and her fits of gaiety more evanescent, and Will was graver and less given to conversation than had been his wont, but otherwise

the difference in their demeanour was too subtle to be remarked by any but themselves.

It could not be said that Will avoided Ginevra, but when they were alone together, he contrived that the talk should flow only in abstract channels. Neither spoke of the future life, of the closer hopes and interests of the other. Will's manner was ceremonious, and he never now sought to detain Ginevra's hand in his, or to take advantage of the many opportunities for intimate intercourse which present themselves in the unconventional life at sea; but she was aware that he kept upon her an unobtrusive watch, shielding her from observation and annoyance, and bearing the brunt of Mr. Medlicott's good-natured pleasantries upon her engagement, which must of necessity now jar upon her, but which Will endured with an imperturbability that did him credit. He was always at hand to perform for her any trifling service, to arrange her cushions, or unasked fetch her shawl; but he never by word or look reminded her of their interview under the palm-trees at Galle; and she sometimes felt inclined to ask herself whether that wild declaration of love had not indeed been all a dream.

The taking in of some new passengers gave fresh stimulus to sociability on board, and life went on in its careless round, in eating and lounging and make-believe work, in gay chattering and display of pretty, cool toilettes and smartly stockinged feet, in graceful badinage, vulgar skirmishing, and more or less open flirtation.

But, however composed Cassilis might appear, he was inwardly consumed by a dæmonic longing to expose Gilmore's secrets, and even though the so doing might for ever place a bar between himself and Ginevra, to show her upon what sort of peg she was hanging so trustfully her pure love and tender girlish expectations.

One night when he and Mr. Medlicott had lingered late over their cigars on deck, he ventured to broach the subject which lay nearest his thoughts. The squatter had been lightly discussing Gilmore's prospects, and had naturally touched upon his ward's engagement.

"Mr. Medlicott," said Will, impulsively, "you know as well as I do the sort of life Gilmore has led, and the ties he has contracted. Do you think it just to a young girl that she should be allowed to marry him in ignorance?"

"You are alluding to the affair with that Indian woman? Really the most that I heard of the circumstances was from yourself. But I do know that it was all put an end to before Gilmore left England, and the children are provided for. He told me so himself. The affair was unfortunate; but what else would you have had him do? As to other matters, why, Will, my dear boy, it is lucky for us men that Society does not expect us to present a clean schedule when we go to the altar."

"I am not talking of what Society expects," said Will with some heat. "There are degrees in everything. A man need not become a total abstainer to prevent himself from being a beast. It is not a question of what a man is, but of what a woman fancies him. There would be no injustice if girls married with their eyes open. Some do, I suppose. The best worth marrying do not."

"You can't eat your cake and have it," remarked Mr. Medlicott philosophically. "It is a little weakness of men to wish to imagine that their wives are as innocent as babes. And it's a well-known fact that a *roué* always makes the best husband."

"I don't suppose that in order to secure conjugal happiness it is essential to cultivate profligacy," said Will. "I think it hard lines that a woman should not know what sort of life she is deliberately going in for. Good Lord!" he cried, rising, and flinging his cigar overboard, while his voice trembled with indignation and repressed excitement, "it is monstrous when you consider the thing! A girl gives up her all—her freshness, her beauty, her trust. It is her supreme chance in life, its crowning or its sacrifice. She has a right to expect something better than the withered husk of impure passions."

"I think that you take an exaggerated view of the whole question," said Mr. Medlicott coldly. In spite of his *bonhommie* he could sometimes be remarkably distant. He puffed at his cigar in silence for a few moments; then said with a laugh that set Will's blood boiling, "Since you lead me to conclude that it is Miss Rolt's engagement which has inspired this righteous wrath, I should begin to suspect an interested motive if I did not know what an insusceptible person you are. I suppose," he went on, "that I know the worst there is to be known about Gilmore. It does not strike me as being particularly outrageous—as the world goes. I am quite alive

to my duty as the young lady's guardian. Her dear good father placed the most implicit confidence in me. I don't see the least reason for any interference on my part. Gilmore turned over a new leaf four years ago. His feelings and sentiments are very right and proper, everything that a parent could desire. No man could be more desperately in love; and Ginevra fully returns his affection. I look upon the marriage as one that promises exceptional happiness. The chances are that there will never be any unpleasant little disclosures, and if there should be"—Mr. Medlicott protruded his under lip and shrugged his shoulders—"women in love don't distress themselves about their husbands' pasts. Ginevra is just the sort of girl to do a Quixotic action and make *protégés* of the children."

Will was silent from disgust. To him Medlicott's remarks savoured of profanation. Obviously, it was best to let the subject drop. He took a hasty stride to the skylight and back, then said, mastering himself with an effort—"I hope you may be right. But I shall always maintain that in the matter of marriage men and women don't start fair. Perhaps in the twentieth century the balance may be more even."

"Or the institution abolished altogether," laughed Mr. Medlicott.

CHAPTER IX.

FAREWELL, SWEET VISION.

THERE is something dreamlike in thus gliding between sea and sky. The senses are lulled; pain becomes delicious melancholy, and anticipation ceases to fret or excite.

They passed the desolate coast of Cape Guardifui and the bluff, forbidding height of Ras Filuk on a grey stormy day, when shoals of porpoises surrounded the vessel, and sea birds flew low. It was evening when they entered Aden harbour, and a pale moon shed a faint illumination upon the barren summits of the mountains that overtopped the glimmering yellow lights of the town; while across the bay, with its many broken phosphorescent gleams, rose higher, spire-like peaks, jagged as though some giant hand had hewn them into shape.

There was music on the deck of the *Djemnah* which hushed all jarring sounds, and deepened the fascination of the night. From the shore, answering Arab calls sounded faintly. Then, two of the passengers sang a fantastic Alpine melody that was caught up by others on board a great steamer anchored near, and in strange incongruity with the tropical evening, a wild jodelling chorus rang over the water, and echoed among the hills.

Ginevra, with a characteristic appeal for sympathy, turned involuntarily towards Will. Ever since that memorable night off the coast of Ceylon, when music was going on, he had seated himself at some distance apart. To-night he was leaning against the bulwarks, and a lantern swinging over his head revealed the play of his features more plainly than he was aware. Ginevra saw that his eyes were fixed upon her in a gaze of the deepest sadness. A faint cry only audible to him escaped her lips. He started, and abruptly left the deck.

So the days went on. The ship steamed through the Red Sea, blue as sapphire and almost as glassy. She coasted rugged islets and sandy shores, and crawled like a huge worm between the low straight banks of the Canal. And Ginevra bore away with her a confused memory of gorgeous desert colouring, pink and violet and gold, blending in the flush of after-glow; of blinding sandy stretches; long lines of camels, and strange mirage—of bronzed, graceful Arabs, in their blue and white garments, 'mid piled-up oranges, and fantastic wares; of veiled Egyptians; of dingy narrow streets, and feathery palms; and then of the blue Mediterranean, and a moving panorama of olive and vine-clad shores; of bold fortresses and nestling villages; of quaint bridges and winding streams, and moving shadows. These and more, all linked together by a thread of pity and regret which gave to the after-images an ineffable sadness; and at last they were in Naples.

Will Cassilis had arranged to quit the *Djemnah* at this place. Yet till the last moment he clung to the society of the Medlicotts, and they all went on shore together, were driven along the Chiaja, and were taken to inspect galleries, churches, and such objects of interest as might be viewed in the space of a few hours.

It was Ginevra's first glimpse of Europe. She was too bewildered to be conscious of sensations. Impressions old and new, clear and distorted, flitted before her mind's eye like

night visions. All was so different to what she had expected; all in its own fashion so sublime.

And this was the scene of that old-world civilization of which she had read and dreamed. It was this region of beauty and enchantment, of tradition and romance, which her father had exchanged for the desolation of Birrali. Ginevra, who among her Australian forests had looked towards the face of Nature as to that of a loving mother, felt a changeling in this Palace of Art. What was her young life with its throbbing impulses, its imperfect harmonies, and swelling sympathies, in comparison with the many mighty lives which had answered here to the summons of Time.

They stood in a lofty church. A priest was saying his Litany in Latin that she but imperfectly understood. A crowd of men and women passed to and fro, and kneeled and bowed. There was a vision of brazen candlesticks; of menacing figures painted upon walls and ceiling; of holy, stern faces that looked at her but did not smile. And over the altar there bent a sculptured Christ, with a lambent light playing above His head and a crown of thorns upon His brow.

A wave-like sense of isolation, of awe, of incomprehension swept over Ginevra, and then she heard Will's voice saying, "I must bid you good-bye now." He was very pale. She thought his lips trembled. Just then there rose the plaint of the organ, filling the vaulted place, and thrilling both with a feeling of sad solemnity.

"I may not see you for a long time," said Will. "If we meet it will be by accident. It is best that we should keep apart now. But I shall think of you always, and if you should ever wish me to serve you, you will know that the most intense longing in my heart is to be of comfort or help to you." He pressed her hand, and before she could reply he had gone.

* * * * * *

Ginevra was nearing Paris, the goal of all her present hopes. During the long night journey from Marseilles she had lain broad awake in her compartment of the *coupé lit*, watching with almost unconscious eyes the bare fields and naked hedges and ghostly poplars, as the train sped swiftly on, while the moon, shining fitfully through driving clouds, illuminated by turns some pallid stretch of water, or low-lying

meadow, some quaint grey house, or patch of unfamiliar landscape, seeming in some uncertain manner to blend the contrasts and incongruities of new and old surroundings; for it was the same moon which had shed its silver beams across the lagoon at Birrali, and had smiled upon the lovers who stood bare-headed on the margin where Brian had made his avowal of love.

Ginevra clasped her hands above her heart to still its throbbing. Who does not know that fever of expectation, that mingled joy and dread which is apt to precede an ardently desired meeting? The first six months of probation were over; the worst ordeal was passed. Upon the morrow Brian's arms would clasp her to him, Brian's lips would be pressed upon her own; his voice would assure her of the reality of a joy which at times of late had seemed to her unsubstantial as the remembrance of a dream.

Though she hesitated to admit the fact even to herself, deeming that to harbour a doubt of his loyalty was an insult to Brian, it was true that Will's words rankled, bringing pain and vague disquietude into her mind. She shrank almost in terror from any attempt to unveil that past, with regard to which Will had implored her to demand Brian's confidence. She now deeply regretted her promise, though a feeling of honour towards the absent commanded her in some sort to fulfil it. Why should she seek to pry into the secrets of Brian's life, when candour concerning them could only be to both a source of pain, and could in no material manner affect their relations towards each other. She recalled their conversation on the hill-side at Birrali, and all her childlike faith rose in revolt. Why should she invite obstacles which *must* melt into nothingness before this mysterious necessity that had forced their souls into oneness? Were not past, present, and future swallowed up in the might of their love? that granted, all else must count for nothing. She would obey in part Will's entreaty. It would be an easy task to establish the conviction that she alone reigned in Brian's heart; but beyond this there should be no questioning, no doubt. She would trust absolutely.

Will had hinted at martyrdom—at sacrifice. Of his true meaning her innocent understanding had only the most vague comprehension; but her imagination, rendered precocious by early training, grasped at stern possibilities of suffering

horror, tragedy; and without directly applying illustrations to her own lot, or definitely formulating her forebodings, she told herself in the excitement of her enthusiasm that martyrdom would be welcome were it the price to be paid for Brian's love.

Thus through the night Ginevra mused, foretasting the bliss of the morrow in indulgence of that spiritual intercourse which seemed the very proof of Brian's truth and devotion; and broken murmurings fell from her lips. "Darling, are you longing for me as I for you? . . . oh, my heart's love, I shall be with you soon. . . ."

The train crept into the terminus, that throbbing centre of the life of a great city. Trembling from nervous exhaustion, bewilderment, and vague dread of meeting her lover's gaze, Ginevra shrank back while the Medlicotts alighted, and were presently greeted by a voice of which the first note thrilled Ginevra's being.

Uncertainly she moved forward. The long platform with its motley crowd faded into blankness. Some one entered the compartment. . . . At last. . . .

"Ginevra."

"Brian."

Hands clasped. Eyes met beaming with love and yearning. Away, weariness, distrust, sorrowful foreboding! Vanish, regretful vision of Will's pleading face. Fade, memory of the dead father, and the mother, with fate shrouded in mystery deeper than death. There is at this moment nothing within or without the world but ecstasy of reunion.

That evening, Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott having discreetly retired to an adjoining apartment, Ginevra and Brian sat alone together in the prim little salon which already Brian's forethought had made home-like with books and flowers.

A wood fire blazed on the open hearth. The pine cones crackled, sending forth their aromatic perfume, and the blue and golden flame cast soft lights upon Ginevra's hair, as she sat upon the rug, her arms resting upon Brian's knee, her eyes upturned to his.

"Darling," he murmured, "if you could but know how I have longed for—dreamed of this hour."

"And I also. In sunlight and twilight, and through the long nights when I have lain awake thinking of you. . . . But we have not been wholly separated, for it was you who

said that for us there could never be real parting. Did you not know when I was with you—by day and in my dreams so often, oh, so often? Have you thought of me, Brian?"

"My sweet one, every hour, every moment."

"And you love me, still—as much as when we were together at Birrali?"

"My dearest, my own only love, can you ask?"

Their lips pressed each other's, and there was a long sweet silence. Then Brian, holding Ginevra a little space from him, gazed into her face with tenderness indescribable.

"Darling, what is it? There is a questioning look in your eyes—a look I do not know. My Ginevra, something troubles you. Are you not quite happy? Have *you* changed?"

"In my love for you? Oh no, no."

"What, then, is working in your thoughts? Does the world seem less fair than when you rode over the hills at Birrali? Is life darker and sadder? Ah! am I not with you to shield you from all sadness? Tell me frankly what is in your mind; we are to be husband and wife, one in everything. Let there be no half confidences now. Speak, my beloved."

Falteringly, and with face averted, Ginevra disburdened her heart of its weight.

"Answer me one question, Brian. Perhaps it is a foolish one, but I—ah, what am I but a foolish, ignorant child, for whom life is full of perplexities and things that I know not; and my truest faith, my surest anchor, the certainty of your love?—tell me, Is your heart indeed wholly mine? Do you love me best on earth?"

"Before God," replied Brian with solemnity, "I have never loved any woman as purely and devotedly as I love you."

Ginevra uttered a faint sigh of content, and taking his hand within her own, laid her cheek against it as if to beseech his pardon for her distrust.

"Had you need to ask?" said Brian. "Did you ever doubt me?"

"Never, never. But the heart is greedy of assurance. And I am only a child; and you have loved before."

Pain, remorse, and a sudden swift sense of guilt pierced Gilmore's heart. Then came the feeling of utter self-abandonment, and determination to spare her suffering even at the

cost of honour and duty. What could be a higher duty than the guarding of her young life, the requital of her perfect love?

"Ginevra," he said, and his voice trembled with earnestness, "when you are my wife I may be able to say to you what now it is impossible for me to frame in words. Then, if you desire it, my past life shall be laid bare to you; all its folly and worthlessness revealed in the light of your purity. This if you require it. But you will not do so. I know that it will be your wish, as it is mine, to seal up the book, and to let the fair new record begin from the day upon which we first met. Since that day my whole being has been strained in longing to be less unworthy of you. My most fervent prayer for the future is that our love may never be sullied by any shadow of the past. It *shall* not be so. I who know evil will ward from you its faintest approach: you shall be shielded, tended, cherished as an angel sent by God from heaven for the purpose of redeeming my lost soul. Oh, my Ginevra, this is what you are to me. This is what you have done for me. Through your influence the faint germs of good which lay in my nature have awakened into life. You have taught me to reverence goodness, to loathe vice. Faulty, weak, unworthy as I am, I know that there is still in me the capacity for noble living, for you love me."

CHAPTER X.

"THINK OF ME AS ONE DEAD."

GILMORE learned from the Medlicotts and not from his betrothed that Will Cassilis had been a passenger in the *Djemnah* from Singapore. The Medlicotts' volubility upon the subject covered Ginevra's embarrassment when appealed to in their presence by her lover as to how far she and Will had become friends. They had much to say concerning the advantage of his presence on board, his unwonted sociability, and the misfortune of his defection at Naples. Ginevra sat silent. When they were alone Brian questioned her again, and she replied frankly that Will had been very kind to her,

and that she liked and esteemed him, and was glad to think that they would meet frequently in England. The faint consciousness in her manner gave Brian a clue to what had really happened; but he had private reasons for avoiding the train of thought which intercourse between his cousin and Ginevra evoked in his mind. Thus, secure in the sense of possession, he did not attempt to verify his suspicions, and loyalty to Will held Ginevra silent.

In this young girl's nature there was a curious mingling of reserve and candour. Certain sensitive fibres in her being shrank from the lightest touch, even the touch of love. In happiness her heart expanded like an opening bud, in sorrow or perplexity it closed itself to outward influences, and fed upon its own sources of consolation. This reticence she had inherited from her father, and it had been strengthened by his training and companionship. Thus, of her wounded love for her dead parent; of the strange interview with Madame Dessolles, and the mysterious doubts and yearnings it had awakened; of Will Cassilis's unreturned affection and her own remorse at the suffering she had caused, she had no impulse to speak. With regard to the latter subject, she was swayed by a feeling of loyalty and sense of delicacy which made it impossible for her to betray even in the sweetest and closest intimacy the painful secrets of another. This also was in part the cause of her shrinking from confidence concerning Madame Dessolles. That shadow of shame and sin, the more terrible because undefined, which darkened her tender thoughts and holy yearnings after the mother, whom her childish imagination had created into an ideal of all that is sacred, beautiful, and unseen, forbade disclosure or appeal to Brian's sympathy. In the slip of paper which since leaving Australia she had guarded carefully, she held the clue to her mother's secret; and she reasoned with sensitive pride, that if in that secret there were indeed shame, it was for the child to shield her mother from the contempt which must of necessity scathe most severely.

When the sojourn in Paris had ended, and they were in London for a few days before going into Woodfordshire, the never-slumbering project of seeking out Madame Dessolles shaped itself in Ginevra's mind into a definite purpose.

It is curious to reflect how closely the orbits of human thought and action intersect each other, while yet the various

minds at work are as far removed from mutual comprehension as might be the respective mental organisms of a snail and an armadillo. Thus now, while Mr. Medlicott in his lawyer's office was conversing with that gentleman upon the best method of discovering the whereabouts of Madame Dessolles, Ginevra in their drawing-room at the hotel was saying to Gilmore—

"I have a great favour to ask you. Mrs. Medlicott is paying calls, and we have the afternoon to ourselves: will you go with me to an address which I will give you, and wait in the cab while I go within and transact my business?"

"Your business! what can that be? and what sort of a place is it? You must really go more into particulars before I make any promises."

"Ah!" said Ginevra, meeting his eyes with her frank serious look, in which there was some sadness. "That is just what I don't wish to do. You must restrain your curiosity, and confine your anxiety to taking care of me. If I did not feel myself so helpless in this big, cruel, wonderful city I would go alone."

"What is the address?" asked Gilmore.

Ginevra read from a set of tablets which she wore at her waist—

MESSRS. GRAY and PRENTISS,
15, Ovingdean Street,
Strand.

Gilmore started and eyed her with keen questioning; but she, her head lowered, while she innocently and lovingly played with the tablets which had been Brian's present, did not meet his look.

"Gray and Prentiss. Lawyers. Yes, I know who they are. What can you want with them?"

"Dearest," said Ginevra, approaching him, and fingering his watch-chain, while she raised her clear, appealing eyes to his, "that is my secret. May I not have one secret?"

Gilmore was silent for a moment. "Has your business any connection with me?" he asked suddenly.

"With you!" echoed Ginevra in a surprised tone, which disarmed his lightning-like suspicion. "Oh no, why should you think so?"

"Surely," demurred Gilmore, "your guardian ought to be consulted."

"No, no," and Ginevra's eyes filled with tears. "I cannot talk about the matter to my guardian. It is peculiarly and privately my own. Will you not trust me and help me? Then I can ask no more favours."

Gilmore replied to her entreaty by ringing the bell and ordering a hansom. In a few moments they were driving towards Fleet Street, Ginevra silent and paler than usual, Gilmore observing her with attention, but making a magnanimous effort to talk commonplace.

The office of Messrs. Gray and Prentiss was in a short narrow street lying at a right angle with the Strand. Gilmore accompanied his companion to the entrance, and saw an inner door swing close behind her; then returned to the cab, and sat framing vague explanations of her conduct, all equally unsatisfactory.

Meanwhile, Ginevra, having asked at haphazard for Mr. Prentiss, was shown into a back-room where an elderly gentleman with grizzled whiskers, pinched-in lips, and prominent eyes, sat writing.

He placed a chair for his visitor, and formally inquired in what way he could serve her. His eyes rested with curiosity upon the young girl, but when she simply stated her mission, asking the address of Madame Dessolles, he looked at her still more keenly and shook his head.

"Why can you not tell me?" exclaimed Ginevra.

The information which this gentleman vouchsafed to her was but meagre. Messrs. Gray and Prentiss, it was true, had occasional business transactions with Madame Dessolles, but they were not authorized to communicate her place of abode to a stranger. If the young lady would leave her name, Madame Dessolles should be informed of her wish; or should she prefer to write, the letter would be duly forwarded.

The latter course seemed obviously most desirable. Writing materials lay near. Ginevra took off her gloves and hastily penned the following:—

"*I have tried to find you, but they will not tell me where you live. You forbade me to seek you, but I must disobey your command. I beseech you, let me come to you. My father is dead. He died immediately after your visit. What was the link between him and you? What are you to me? I dare not write the thoughts which fill my mind; but I am almost certain*

that I know the truth. Oh! believe that my heart aches with longing and with love. Write me one line to say that I may come.

"GINEVRA."

She added the name of the hotel where she was staying, the Medlicotts' country address, and stated the length of time they would probably remain in London; then sealed the letter and gave it into the lawyer's hands.

He bowed her out of the office. Gilmore was waiting in the street, and placed her in the cab, giving the order to return.

"Is it permitted," he said presently, "to inquire whether you have accomplished what you wished?"

"Yes, no, not quite. I have been disappointed."

"You found Prentiss obliging, I hope. But he had probably been prepared for your visit, and knew who you were."

"No, I did not tell him my name. Yes, he was obliging. I shall not require to see him again."

"I am glad to hear that. And now I can make a virtue of necessity, and will promise to worry you by no more questions."

Late upon the following day Ginevra received an answer to her letter. It was evident that the writer had laboured under stress of agitation; and there were marks of tears upon the paper.

"It is sweet to me to feel that your heart yearns towards me; but you have a right to know that I deserve nothing from you but reproach and scorn.

"Think of me as of one dead, and if you have been taught to pray, invoke God's mercy for me as we entreat for the souls of those in purgatory. Stifle all your hopes and longings that we may know each other. There can be no further meeting for us in this world, unless indeed the time should come in which you are alone and friendless and in deep distress—when love and sympathy are denied you by those who have a right to offer it. In this case only, go to Mr. Prentiss, and he will have my instructions to direct you to me.

"Farewell.

"C. D."

The evasive, despairing words told their own secret. Pain and rapture met and kissed each other, as Ginevra knelt in

her chamber with Clémence's letter pressed to her bosom. Of a surety, she knew now that she was not motherless; and if the knowledge inflicted a sharp stab, it brought also an ecstasy which was almost divine.

In emotional natures a sentiment rapidly develops into a passion. Ginevra's instincts were keenly human. Her devotion to her father, in spite of his coldness or reserve, had never drooped. And now filial love, strengthened by appeal to her pity, and by the elements of mystery, romance,—above all, by the subtle sympathy existing between woman and woman-child,—put forth fresh roots, and sprang within her into yet more vigorous being. It seemed to her that the sense of her mother's encompassing love, though she had never shaped it into definite thought, had always been present in her consciousness. . . . And this backward glimpse of her mental life brought awe-inspiring suggestions of spiritual possibilities. It was as though the flash of God's eye had for a second lightened her darkness.

"Mother," murmured Ginevra, low to herself, "if there be a God who loves His children, He will bring mother and child together."

CHAPTER XI.

FRETTERLY.

Ginevra Rolt's first impressions of Woodfordshire were agreeable ones. Champneys was a large house, with echoing corridors, quaint recesses, haunted rooms, much carving in oak and armorial emblazonments. Legends had gathered thickly round the place. The Champneys had once been a powerful family, and till the present century had from time immemorial dwelt upon the soil. They had flourished and faded, generation by generation, and when they had become extinct the property, after passing through various hands, had finally been bought, traditions, ancestral portraits, and ghosts included, by the rich Australian squatter, Andrew Medlicott. Ill-natured persons were in the habit of remarking that Mr. Medlicott would fain have purchased the family

pedigree also, and that, failing this, he did his best to appropriate it.

It was in all the pride of recent proprietorship that Mr. Medlicott exhibited to his ward the glories of his English possessions. Ginevra, not, to outsiders, its least interesting feature, was borne along in a triumphal procession through park and village. Mr. Medlicott made a point of exacting all dues which could to Cæsar appertain. A return from Australia presented a legitimate occasion for display. Thus, his home-coming might have been that of a long-lost heir or conquering hero. Bells pealed forth; school children chanted; arches reared themselves above the gateways, and flags floated in the soft May breeze.

The sweet childish face, in line with Mrs. Medlicott's Roman profile, its clear startled eyes, and expression of appeal, almost of sadness, contradicted by the lurking dimples about the lips, and frank smiles of enjoyment, created a considerable impression upon the spectators of the Champneys ovation.

"Who is she? Whence does she come? Australian! Impossible! A ward of Mr. Medlicott's. The daughter of Rolt the writer. An heiress who is engaged to that reformed scamp, Brian Gilmore." Such were the remarks which circulated among the neighbours who had assembled to bid Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott welcome; and, the Gilmores being well known in Woodfordshire, before the morrow Ginevra had been fully discussed in most of the county houses within easy distance of Champneys.

Brian did not accompany the Medlicotts into Woodfordshire. Early in June, at his mother's request, he escorted her and Sir Michael to certain German baths which had been recommended to the latter; and it was not till their return at the end of July that Lady Gilmore wrote, cordially entreating her future daughter-in-law to visit Brian's home, which was some little distance from Champneys at the other side of the county.

The invitation was accepted; and Brian and his betrothed journeyed together to Fretterly.

As she halted before the half-open door of the drawing-room, a faint buzz of feminine voices, alternating with an old man's guttural bass, sounded in Ginevra's ears. Brian, a step in the rear, had paused to say a word to one of the servants. She stood trembling; the beaming flush mounted to her

cheeks. "Brian," she murmured faintly; he was at her side. In a moment the *portière* was drawn, revealing a long bow-windowed room, full of a litter of pleasant things; and the bride expectant stood in the presence of her future relatives.

A short, well-preserved lady, with dignified gait, bright shallow dark eyes, silvery hair shrouded in black lace, and cameo-like features, advanced and kissed her, murmuring some apologies for not having met her guest at the station. It had been impossible for her to leave Sir Michael, and Rosamond had an engagement; and then the carriage had driven round so noiselessly, etc. Lady Gilmore's natural bent lay towards the utterance of agreeable nothings. She spoke rapidly, but distinctly, and her manner possessed a kind of graceful artificiality, which was in reality the result of nervousness conquered with difficulty. Long attendance upon an invalid husband of an exacting disposition and uncertain temper had affected her health and spirits. She was Sir Michael Gilmore's second wife, and Brian was her only son. This darling of her heart had been to her by turns a source of pride and anxiety. She had rejoiced over his good looks, talents, and popularity, had moaned over his misdeeds, and sorrowed during his exile. Now that he had returned to his native land, and was about to make an advantageous marriage, she felt that her cup of happiness was reasonably full.

Poor Lady Gilmore! she would have preferred an English daughter-in-law, but was quite prepared to be pleased with her son's betrothed, and had mentally reconciled herself to certain roughnesses and peculiarities which she imagined inseparable from an Australian education. But a glance at the figure which approached had assured her that she might have relied with perfect confidence upon Brian's fastidious taste. Ginevra was more than ladylike, more than beautiful; she was picturesque. To be picturesque was, in Lady Gilmore's eyes, the supreme attraction. Life had afforded her few materials for romance in her own person, and she was fond of creating it in the persons of those around her. It was one of her minor trials that Rosamond Churchill, her relative now in the room, had no capacity for graceful posing. Lady Gilmore was a curious mixture of unselfish heroism, sentiment, worldliness, and superficial culture. Her mind was pictorial. She was fond of tabulating her acquaintances, mentally describing

them and supplying backgrounds suitable to their peculiarities. In a second, her imagination had composed the picture of a shy lovely child of nature, needing caresses and gentle encouragement. She took off Ginevra's hat and kissed her again.

"You are very pretty, my love," she said, in her frank, yet affected, manner. "I am not at all surprised that you should have captivated Brian's heart. You must let me thank you for being so good to him. I shall love you quickly and dearly: of that I feel certain already. Brian tells me that you have no relatives living; and I am tempted to rejoice in your loneliness; for you will become one of ourselves all the more completely."

"Sweet Placidia," said a voice from a reclining chair placed in the most convenient angle of the window, "when you have gushed quite to your heart's content, perhaps you will let me have a glimpse of my charming daughter-in-law that is to be. That she is charming her voice tells me, but I should like to verify the fact."

Ginevra, starting, turned towards the occupant of the reclining chair, who, bolstered by air-cushions, half covered by Oriental shawls, and surrounded generally by all the paraphernalia of interesting invalidism, stretched forth two slim white hands to greet her.

"Forgive me, my dearest child. I am a poor wretch; the victim of doctors, and of sweet Placidia's domestic tyranny. That is my little term of endearment for Lady Gilmore. She is so strict in her discipline, so abominably good-tempered, so serenely forgetful, and, above all, so monotonously amiable, that her sweetness is apt to cloy. I could swear, dearest, that in the excitement of expecting this arrival, you have quite forgotten to remind Jones that my poor nerves are *not* to be shattered by another onslaught on the gong this evening."

Lady Gilmore flushed, but smiled sweetly, and rang the bell, and Sir Michael proceeded with his inspection of Ginevra. He was a handsome old man, with finely cut features and piercing eyes; but the effect of his appearance was marred by his harsh, unpleasing voice and domineering manner, enhanced by its effort at airy gaiety.

"Upon my word, I begin to consider my son Brian a lucky dog—far luckier than he deserves to be. My dear Ginevra,"

—and Sir Michael bestowed a patronizing kiss upon the young girl's hand,—"I congratulate Brian—I congratulate myself. In return, I hope that you won't find us quite intolerable. We are behind the times, but, in the main, we are well-intentioned. We will do our best to render Fretterly agreeable to you."

Sir Michael's lofty humility was beautiful to behold; but it had a touch of the ludicrous. Ginevra laughed softly as she replied—

"You will make me very happy, Sir Michael;" but the laugh displeased him, and perhaps accounted for the asperity with which he addressed his son.

"And why on earth were you not here on Saturday, Brian? You knew that Heggate was coming to settle about the lease of Abbott's farm."

Ginevra shrank back from the couch, and Lady Gilmore began to pour out the tea.

A young lady, with rather hard features, cold blue eyes, and fair hair tangled over her forehead, dressed in a gown of Oxford shirting, mannish by reason of the tight collar and leather belt, from which dangled a Norwegian dagger, a whistle, and other ornaments not essentially feminine, came forward and held out her hand, drawing Ginevra a little aside.

"No one has introduced me," she began brusquely, "so I had better take that office upon myself. I am Rosamond Churchill, Lady Gilmore's cousin. Has Brian ever mentioned me to you?"

"I am afraid that I may have forgotten, Miss Churchill, I have been so short a time in England, and my mind is still confused."

"Is it? I should not have thought so; at any rate, you have the art of disarming criticism. It is not likely, however, that you should have heard Brian mention me. I am not a favourite of his. He looked surprised—I might say annoyed—to see me here. I half intended to go away yesterday; but, candid confession being good for the soul, I may as well own that I had a curiosity to see you. Let me take your cloak; Sir Michael will wish to monopolize you presently; he is very much struck by you; he is a *connoisseur* in looks and in clothes. It is always a great thing for 'sweet Placidia' when a charming woman from the outer world

arrives and diverts his thoughts from his grievances and his ailments. Oh, Lady Gilmore is devoted to him; she doesn't mind his '*ways*' in the least. But, then, she is full of tact. It was entirely through her management that Brian came in for Little Fretterly. You must be anxious to get at the ins and outs of everything. I will give you a map of the county if you care about it. You see that I am very frank. That is my *rôle*, and I sometimes succeed in amusing people by my candour. When one is pretty, it is not necessary to take any trouble; but we plain persons are bound to be entertaining after the best fashion open to us."

All this was poured forth in rapid, not unmelodious, contralto tones, while Sir Michael perused the *Times*, which had just been brought in, and Brian conversed aside with his mother.

"What is Rosamond doing here? I thought she was to have left yesterday."

"Oh, she wished to remain," answered Lady Gilmore hesitatingly; "and there was no reason why she should not. Between ourselves, I think her sister is glad to be left in the undisturbed management of the babies. You will find Rosamond more sensible than she used to be."

"I am glad of that," said Brian laughingly. "There was some room for improvement."

"I like frankness," Ginevra was saying on the other side, as she sipped her tea and fixed her clear eyes upon Miss Churchill's face. In Rosamond's affectation of bluntness and eccentricity, and in a certain underlying intensity of manner, there was something at once attractive and repellant. "I shall be glad to know how I can best please Brian's people."

"Oh, you need suffer no anxiety upon that score. You are rich, handsome, and charming. Sir Michael adores money—and charm. Lady Gilmore adores beauty; and, then, she would adore any one whom Brian adored. It is all delightfully simple and satisfactory. Your future mother-in-law will request you to sit to her for your portrait—did you not know that she paints after an amateurish fashion?—and your likeness will be handed down to posterity, on one of the folds of a mythological screen destined to immortalize all the noteworthy female Gilmores from the time of Henry the Eighth to the present generation."

Rosamond paused, and glanced up at Brian, who had

approached. Her eyes softened momentarily; she looked almost handsome; but in a second the hard expression had returned to her face. Ginevra and Lady Gilmore made a simultaneous movement towards each other; and Brian sank into the vacant chair by Miss Churchill's side.

"Well, Rosamond! I have hardly seen you since my return to England. You look stronger than when I went away. I hope that the world in general is smooth to you. Do you still go through life with your hand raised against every man, and are you spared the thrusts which are our usual portion?"

Rosamond held out her hand, which was slim and white, and excused some vanity. "It is pachydermatous," she answered. "So is my heart. Pin-pricks and sword-thrusts hurt neither. You look well too. I have as yet had no opportunity for congratulating you. Are you ecstatically happy?"

"Don't you think that I have reason to be so?"

Miss Churchill's eyes passed slowly and inquiringly over his face.

"You have an enormous capacity for devotion," she answered with some bitterness. "You are like Rousseau, whose latest ladylove was always *la seule et la dernière de ma vie.*"

"At all events, it is a charming illusion. How long is it, Rosamond, since you learned to be so cynical?"

"Since I began to be justified in my low opinion of human nature."

"Ah, that is a bad trait—especially in a woman. She should at least pin her faith upon the perfectibility of man."

"Like your Ginevra," replied Rosamond, moving abruptly towards the window. "Take care that her faith is not rudely shaken."

"That shall never happen, if it lies in my power to prevent it," said Gilmore earnestly; "but I must entreat, Rosamond, that you will not inoculate her with your worldly wisdom."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GNAWING OF REMORSE.

GINEVRA'S introduction to the Gilmores was an unqualified success, if may be excepted a certain embarrassing consciousness in the bearing of Rosamond Churchill—a closely veiled animosity, impossible to define, which yet acted upon the young girl's impressionable temperament. A few words of Lady Gilmore's, as they sat together after dinner inspecting photographs, while Miss Churchill was at the piano, shed a faint light upon the subject.

"That," said the elder lady, pointing to a vignette which Ginevra fancied that she recognized, "is a likeness of Rosamond, taken five or six years ago, when her complexion was better than it is now. You would hardly believe, my dear, that she once had a skin as clear and delicate as your own. She used to stay with us a great deal at one time. Her home was so uncomfortable—a set of unruly boys and a disagreeable stepmother. Rosamond liked coming here; our house was gayer in those days. Brian had come home from India, and used to run down here occasionally." . . . Lady Gilmore sighed deeply. "Perhaps I ought not to mention it; there were complications—there always are in these nondescript relationships—Brian, handsome and charming, treated Rosamond as a child. She was foolish enough to allow herself to become attached—I am not sure that he ever guessed it. Ah, if we had only known at the time!" Lady Gilmore sighed again, and passed her hand caressingly over that of Ginevra. "My love, I cannot convey to you how happy it makes me to see Brian's devotion to you. However, to return to Rosamond, she caught a fever which was going about in the village, was ill for months, and lost her complexion."

Rosamond approached them at the moment, and Lady Gilmore hurriedly turned over the leaf. There was a request that Ginevra would go to the piano. With a shy glance at Brian she sang the quaint ballad which had captivated his fancy during their memorable row on the Leichardt river; and then a spirited aboriginal war song, which led to an animated description of a Bunya Feast and a Corroboree.

Sir Michael was amused. He, too, began to consider his future daughter-in-law from the barbaric-picturesque point of view. He made her sit beside him, and interspersed his querulous appeals to sweet Placidia upon the subjects of draughts and air-cushions with complimentary remarks addressed to his guest; while Lady Gilmore's practical mind began to scheme the possibility of converting the stone hall at Little Fretterly by means of opossum rugs and aboriginal weapons into a sort of civilized wigwam, which should be a suitable setting for its future occupant.

Ginevra now watched Rosamond with quickened interest, in which there was an element of gentle pity. The most pure are not without some faint admixture of the world's dross; and the woman preferred may feel tender compassion for the one despised, without the consciousness that she is yielding to an unworthy impulse.

Later, Ginevra, sitting dreamily over the fire in her bedroom, was hardly surprised when a knock sounded at her door, and Rosamond herself, in a grey dressing-gown, with her hair hanging loose over her shoulders, advanced from the threshold.

"I am going away by an early train, to-morrow," she said abruptly; "and as I did not bid you good-bye in the drawing-room, I have come to say it here. I hope that you have no objection."

Ginevra placed a chair and footstool before the fire, and welcomed her visitor.

"You have not given me the map of the county which you promised me," she said, with her engaging smile.

"Oh! you do not require it. I see that you have a genius for captivation. And, on the whole, are you pleased with the place and the people?"

"The house is lovely—far more harmonious than Champneys; Lady Gilmore—indeed, you all are delightful."

Rosamond made a mocking curtsey. "It is well perhaps that I am going away to-morrow. If I stayed longer you might reverse your judgment of one member of the family. Of course Lady Gilmore is delightful. You have reclaimed Brian, and she longs to show you her gratitude. Now, her keenest desire is that your marriage should be hastened."

"That is impossible. It cannot take place before December. And even this seems heartless, so soon after my father's death."

"Your father was a peculiar person?" said Rosamond interrogatively. "One of the new school of thought, was he not? Lady Gilmore is quite alive to his intellectual superiority; but I think it was a relief to her when you betrayed inadvertently that you had been to church."

Ginevra was silent. Rosamond continued—

"To-morrow you will see Little Fretterly—your future home. You will be charmed with that house also; but I suppose that to such a pair of turtle-doves as Brian and you surroundings are not of much consequence. He is very fortunate—I think that I agree with Sir Michael—more fortunate than he deserves to be. I wonder if you are aware that he has been a great flirt—as we women euphemistically put it."

Ginevra made a little gesture, half of dignity, half of pain.

"Ah! I see that you are above jealousy."

"There is nothing to rouse it. It would be the refinement of folly to repine because Brian has not always known me."

Rosamond eyed her keenly. "What an exemplary wife you will make. I begin to think that life in the wilds of Australia is a good preparation for fashionable matrimony. Oh!" she continued, with a vehemence which startled Ginevra, "what must it be to feel the happiness of perfect security—of far-away-ness from all that is of the world, the flesh, and the devil! Unpleasant objects viewed from a picturesque distance don't seem to mar the beauty of a mental landscape. Some persons have the knack of bringing their lives into an agreeable focus. I have not."

Ginevra touched Rosamond's hand sympathetically.

"To me life is bald, horrible reality," continued Rosamond. "From the time that I was a mere baby I have seen nothing but its worst side. Inappreciation, injustice, unloveliness, jealousy, disappointment—these have been my teachers. No fresh, pure influences have moulded me. What a contrast to *your* lot! I wish that I had been brought up like you, out of hearing of the world's cruel voices. . . . No, I do not. It is possible that you may never awaken from your happy dream; but if you do awake, life will seem to you doubly God-forsaken. You are so fresh, so innocent, so unconsciously appealing, that people *may* tread softly for fear of breaking your slumber. Innocence has great power."

"Then," said Ginevra, smiling, but with vague uneasiness, "it would be a pity ever to destroy it."

"There you are right; and as Brian gently hinted this afternoon, if you hold much converse with such a battered wretch as I am, you will run the risk of contamination. I had better leave you. Well, I only came to say good-bye—for the present. I am often here, and we shall probably meet again before you are married. I hope that you may be pleased with Little Fretterly."

Her wish sounded like the valediction of a malevolent fairy; and she departed as abruptly as she had entered.

Ginevra sat till midnight had struck, wrapped in a dreamy reverie. She was too happy to be more than faintly affected by Rosamond's strange words. Her arms were crossed with a hand upon each shoulder, as though she were hugging to her bosom this warmth of love; her little feet stretched themselves towards the fire, her head was thrown back, her lips parted in a tremulous smile. Brian's good-night kiss seemed still to linger upon them. He had been so tender to her to-day. His voice had sounded so sweetly in her ears when, during the short time that they had spent alone, he had talked to her gravely yet rapturously of their future married life. The solemnity of his manner had touched and awed her. At that moment their souls seemed to realize in its full beauty the ideal union in which two beings are blended together in perfect harmony; and the holy joy which they felt now in being together was, they knew, but a foreshadowing of the bliss of daily, hourly companionship.

Instinctively Ginevra's heart lifted itself upwards in reverent gratitude. Surely some Divine Will was ordering her fate; it could not be to chance that she owed her happiness; and if indeed it were true that she had made Brian a better man, there was wonderful peace and satisfaction in the thought that she should be the instrument for good to the one whom she loved supremely.

"Oh, God," she murmured,—and, poor untaught child, she knew not the Deity to whom she prayed,—"Thou hast been very good to me. Give me my mother, and my joy will be full."

Thus enfolded as she was by this sweet consciousness, Rosamond's baleful insinuations, Will Cassilis's warnings, the vague apprehension which, at rare moments, she felt of some-

thing foul underlying the life that appeared so fair, seemed to Ginevra nothing more than shadows of the imagination.

* * * * * *

Upon the morrow Ginevra went with Brian to see their future home.

Little Fretterly, which had for generations belonged to a younger branch of Lady Gilmore's family, was about two miles distant from the great house. It was built of grey stone, half mantled in ivy; the back pure Elizabethan, the front savouring of the Georges, whilst a quaint clock-tower of no particular order of architecture surmounted the entrance.

Behind there was a smooth bowling-green, picturesquely surrounded on three sides by grey walls. Beyond were grassy terraces, leading to an old-fashioned orchard which sloped to the west. Dark shrubberies and clipped yew hedges made a background to flower borders, where from time immemorial southernwood had flourished, and where hollyhocks and giant poppies bloomed 'mid a crowd of gay perennials.

A stone-paved path extended from the hall door to the great iron gates; and running east was a long straight avenue flanked by weed-grown fish-ponds. Within a flagged hall, long low rooms, with deep, low windows and garlanded wainscots, embroidered chairs of straight slender fashion, quaint cabinets, rich-hued china, faded tapestry, and low-toned hangings, gave a general impression of sombre luxury and harmonious colouring. An ideal abode for a romantic and handsome couple, whose lover-like posing demanded a suitable background, or for an old gentleman of genial disposition and antiquarian tastes, desiring to take a moderate part in the gaieties of a sociable county.

Fires were burning in the principal rooms, in welcome to Ginevra, who felt chill even in an English summer; and in anticipation of her visit Brian had contrived to impart a look of habitation to the drawing-room.

They were alone, free to ramble as they would over the house and grounds. It was a day which neither could ever forget; and not this day only; for Little Fretterly became during Ginevra's visit to the Gilmores a refuge from the dulness of conventionality and the gall of restricted intercourse. Sir Michael might utter his querulous complaints and no less querulous compliments; Lady Gilmore might smile

and her talk ripple on in undisturbed serenity; the country neighbours might press their courtesies; but here, Brian and Ginevra were free to hold sweet converse without fear of intrusion.

It was a foretaste of matrimonial privacy; and the lovers spent many happy hours in devising improvements in the rooms which were to be Ginevra's, in planning which corner of her boudoir should be occupied by the book-case which was to contain Dr. Rolt's library; where should hang the mementoes of Birrali that now adorned her room at Champneys; in discussing the details of that wide new life before them—Ginevra with a sweet timidity, a tentative clutching at joy, which was inexpressibly bewitching, Gilmore with ardent resolve that had also the fierce excitement of uncertainty.

For he was not happy. Often now he realized in its fulness the vague fancy which had tormented him at Birrali, that these better impulses and purer yearnings were in truth the purgatorial fire through which he must pass to higher good. In his heart there was a deep-seated sadness; and his happiness had a bitter flavouring of apprehension for which he was at a loss to account; for it had no rise in any doubt of Ginevra's love. His nerves were unstrung, his existence was a probation sweetened by brief flashes of heavenly bliss. A stalking dread seemed to interpose between his desire and its fulfilment—a dread which he knew would only be laid upon his wedding-day. Though he smiled to himself at the fancy, he could not divest himself of the feeling that his marriage would be to him a sort of moral regeneration, a baptism into a higher life. Nor could he shake off a sense of doom and remorse, entirely, as he believed, disproportionate to its cause. All sorts of vague resolutions flitted through his mind, the most tenacious that of making adequate provision for the children whom he had wronged by bringing them into the world. His son was at a semi-charitable school, an institution where the education of many similar unfortunates was carried on at a minimum cost, and where, with the assistance of Will Cassilis, Gilmore had been glad to place the boy.

He remembered the child well—a dark-haired, brown-eyed little fellow, like himself, and who even in babyhood had evinced an unreasoning affection towards his father; of the little girl Brian had no recollection. One child had died

between the two, and she had been born shortly before the break up of his relations with her mother. But he knew of her existence. Gilmore had a fondness for his offspring. He was a man in whom, under suitable conditions, the domestic virtues might have been cultivated most successfully. With the thought of those children and of that episode in his life there was bound up a half-tender, half-sickening regret, very different from the disgust which had prompted him to say impatiently to Mr. Medlicott one day, when pressed by that gentleman to account for his dislike to dining with their party at one of the fashionable London restaurants—

'Oh, one is apt as a young man to form acquaintances of which one does not wish to be reminded in the company of ladies. There really should be some decent place where a man can take his wife and sisters to dine."

Since his return to England, Gilmore had many times been visited by a keen desire to see his son. During his life in Australia, when he had felt hopelessly discontented, and held quiescent by distance, the influence of his children over his thoughts had been comparatively slight. Now that a definite sphere of happy action opened out before him, they began to occupy a new and disturbing place in his consciousness.

Yet he hesitated to take any step which might bring him into contact with their mother, or involve him in embarrassing scenes and explanations. To seek them out now seemed treasonable towards Ginevra. To confide in her before their marriage impossible.

And once or twice lately he had fancied that he observed in Ginevra a timid questioning movement towards him, as though she had some confidence to impart or demand to make, at the utterance of which she hesitated. Urged on his side by a nameless dread and repugnance, he had repelled the movement and arrested the impulse on her lips. Her consciousness seemed too painful for him to suppose readily that the matter had only to do with herself. Since the day when he had taken her to the office of Messrs. Gray and Prentiss, though he had rejected the notion at the time, he could not afterwards divest himself of the fancy that her visit had had reference to something she might have heard or suspected of his former life. That her distrust had been dispelled he was certain, and he imagined that her desire to confide in him arose from a reproachful feeling that she had wronged him.

He avoided all allusion to these lawyers, who had been concerned in certain monetary arrangements with the woman he had deserted. Thus the struggling towards a revelation which might have altered both their lives was checked. Ginevra buried the secret of her mother's existence in her own bosom. It was too slightly incorporated with the actualities of her life, and reserve was too natural to her for her to find reticence difficult; and Brian resolved that till Ginevra was his wife, and the bloom of her maiden innocence brushed ever so lightly, he would not tell her the truth as to those ties which weighed upon him so sorely. Then he would throw himself upon her love and generosity, and rely upon her co-operation in his work of reparation to his son.

He thought once or twice of applying to Will Cassilis, and making the latter a second time his agent; but all that he gleaned and suspected concerning Will's attitude towards Ginevra made him shrink from communicating with his cousin upon a subject that affected her. Will seemed determined to avoid intercourse with the Gilmores and Medlicotts. He had been invited to Fretterly upon the occasion of Ginevra's expected visit, but had declined. He had also refused to go to Champneys, giving as a excuse that he was about to establish himself in practice in London. Gilmore also avoided Will. He had the same sort of feeling towards the latter as he entertained for all men and women who reminded him of the undercurrent upon which he had once floated. Sitting with his hand clasping that of Ginevra, he would fain have washed away all recollections of his former life. But it is the torture of analytical natures that self-effacement is to them impossible, and all through Brian's inner consciousness there flowed the same strain of uneasy fear. His moments of most exquisite happiness were in this manner alloyed. Sometimes he accepted his mental condition as a retributive consequence of his actions. More often, he tried to escape from it as something abnormal and irrational.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ADAGIO MOVEMENT.

GINEVRA'S visit to Fretterly extended beyond the fortnight which had been already fixed upon as its term. August was in its glory when she returned to Champneys, and already preparations for her marriage were in progress. Lawyers were busy with settlements, and milliners had begun to make designs for her trousseau. Then suddenly a course of Buxton waters was prescribed for Mrs. Medlicott, and the whole family migrated thither. September saw them settled in London for the two remaining months of Gilmore's probation. Mr. Medlicott's duties as Dr. Rolt's executor had, in regard to one portion, been easily fulfilled. There had been little difficulty in discovering Mrs. Fosgate, or Madame Dessolles, as she now called herself. Through her solicitors, Messrs. Gray and Prentiss, she had proved her identity, and had received the first instalment of the income which her husband had bequeathed to her.

At first she recoiled strongly from the thought of profiting by this proof of generosity from one whom she had so deeply wronged. When she had told him at Birrali that it would be easier to take the wages of sin than to accept money at his hands, she had meant her words to the full.

But now, death seemed to have swept pride and bitterness away. She was deeply moved by the evidence of his forgiveness; and she was heartsore and weary. The fire of resistance had burned out. Her hopeless journey to Australia, those terrible interviews with her husband and her daughter, despair of ever again seeing Brian, whom she loved more passionately than even in the old time, seemed to have exhausted the springs of her nature. She thought of her children's future, and felt that there was now nothing left for her but to accept passively such good or ill as might fall to her lot. At least her humiliation could not be deepened.

The transaction had been conducted upon both sides with discreet reserve. Clémence made no disclosures, and though Mr. Medlicott had strong reasons for conjecturing that Dr. Fosgate and the recluse of Birrali were one and the same, he

respected his friend's wish for secrecy and refrained from putting any point-blank questions which would have confirmed his suspicions. Mindful of his promise to guard Ginevra from remotest contact with this woman whom he now believed to be her mother, Mr. Medlicott parried all Madame Dessolles' inquiries concerning his ward, and when their interview closed, pompously delivered himself of these words, with an emphasis which accentuated his meaning—

"My friend, Dr. Rolt, when he entrusted me with the carrying out of his purposes in regard to you, did not see fit to tell me what had been your former relations with him. No doubt he had good reason for silence, and you must not suppose that I want to pry into his secrets; but this charge he did solemnly lay upon me, Madame Dessolles—that I should keep his daughter from the knowledge of your existence and from the slightest intercourse with you. I mean to be faithful to my trust. I don't know what your intentions or desires are, but I am sure that it is not necessary for me to appeal to your honour for aid in the discharge of a sacred duty."

A flash, it might have been of triumph, darted from Clémence's eyes, but they were quickly averted.

"I have no intention, sir, of thrusting myself upon your ward. While she is prosperous and happy intercourse with me would only do her harm. I have no wish to seek it. As far as I am concerned, Dr. Rolt's injunctions shall be observed."

So saying, Madame Dessolles took her leave with an air of dignified reserve which set Mr. Medlicott's fears at rest, and assisted in neutralizing unpleasant impressions. He went away with the agreeable consciousness of having fully performed his duty, and after moralizing in his happy-go-lucky way upon life in general, and the usually unfortunate domestic arrangement of poets and philosophers in particular, he dismissed the episode from his thoughts, which were at this time more deeply occupied with Ginevra's settlements and the possibility of bringing Sir Michael Gilmore to satisfactory terms.

One day during their stay in London Mrs. Medlicott and Ginevra went by invitation to luncheon with an aunt of Lady Gilmore's, who had expressed herself desirous to make the acquaintance of the bride elect. Shortly after luncheon Will

Cassilis came in; and while Mrs. Medlicott lingered to exchange some confidential remarks with her hostess upon the subject of the marriage, he was bidden by the latter to take Ginevra to a little boudoir leading from the stairs, and show her the miniature of a great-uncle of Brian's on the maternal side whom he was supposed to resemble.

No move could have been more opportune. Will opened the door for Ginevra, and they passed out down the staircase without speaking. It was not till they had reached the boudoir that he said—

"I am glad to be able to speak to you for a moment alone."

Ginevra coloured deeply. This unexpected interview with Will was fraught at once with pleasure and dread. He too was deeply moved. In the dim drawing-room, where she had shrunk into the most shadowy corner, he had found but meagre opportunity for discovering if she were changed; here, with a ray of the November sunshine streaming through an uncurtained window full upon her, he was able to observe every detail of her appearance—her drooped head, her air of embarrassment, her innocent preoccupation; no need to ask if she were happy, content was written on her face;—to observe the increased richness of her dress, the presence of sundry unfamiliar ornaments which instinct told him had been of Gilmore's choosing.

Then all thoughts melted in the joy he felt at again holding her hand within his own.

"It is a long time since we said good-bye at Naples—at least it has seemed so to me."

"And to me also," replied Ginevra.

"But in a different way." Will paused and looked at her questioningly, as though he would fain read her soul. She, glancing up, met his look and answered it.

"I wanted to tell you——" she began simply. Then the crimson rushed to her face, and she uttered her words with difficulty—"I wanted you to know that I—did do what you wished.—And there was no need to ask if his heart were wholly mine. I think that you will be glad—notwithstanding everything—that I am happy; and that I ask for no sweeter fate than to be his wife."

"Glad that you are happy!" repeated Will in a tone of the deepest tenderness. "Is not that assurance all the world to me? If I could believe that you would always be so, I too

should be content with my fate. Well, I have done what I could, and I must try to think that things are best as they are. Your goodness will be your safeguard against evil. I pray for you always; I will continue to pray that you may remain till your life's end true and pure in heart as you are now. That is the best wish I can frame for you. I have heard of you," he went on in a different tone, "since your visit to Fretterly. There, as you are probably aware, you have won golden opinions. I am glad that you have made my aunt fond of you. Hers is a nature which underneath its superficial effusiveness has crystallized into hardness. You will soften it. They asked me to meet you, but—it is so natural to me to be quite frank with you that I think it must be best—you understand why I did not go?"

Ginevra inclined her head.

"I heard some time ago that your marriage would take place in December," continued Will. "Of course I expected what you have just told me. During those months I have been resolutely trying to look upon it as a matter-of-course, to put all my own hopes and longings out of the question. Let us agree to believe that I have succeeded. Any way, it can make no difference. I have tried to convince myself that your love must be the truest touchstone. And the inevitable gives a certain bias to one's judgment. It is the curse of all of us that we can see so little beyond the circle of our personal desires. At least there must be comfort in the feeling that one has not the choice of alternatives—that the lives of those for whom we care deeply are arranged beyond the possibility of our control. I dare say it is best so. Fate has a way of mixing a hotch-potch of rights and wrongs, so that, contrary to our expectations, it turns out a delicately flavoured dish."

The tears gathered in Ginevra's eyes. Will's love and despair, which had of late been thrust back by the pressure of more absorbing interests, again painfully obtruded themselves, and made her feel more strongly than ever that she was a blight upon his life. He divined her thought; and, angry with himself, went on hurriedly in a more cheerful tone—

"I am glad that I have chanced upon you to-day. The sight of you has done me good. It is *everything* to know that you are happy. My imagination can take no pleasure in a mental picture of you—pained—doubtful. Ginevra," he added insistently, realizing that it might be his last opportunity for

speech with her of this sort, "if you are ever in trouble, I beseech you do not let any scruple deter you from sending for me. There would be no disloyalty to Brian; and I think that I might help you better perhaps than any one else in the world."

Ginevra placed her hand in his, as solemnly as though she were giving a pledge. As he released it Mrs. Medlicott's train rustled through the doorway.

"Ginevra, my love, we must really be going. I have said your good-bye to Mrs. Forsyth, who hopes to see you again on Thursday. And now we must hurry off to St. James's Hall if we want to hear Joachim this afternoon. Well, Dr. Cassilis, I must say that you treat your distant relatives a great deal better than you treat your friends. We have been three weeks in London, and you have never been near us. What have you been doing with yourself since we parted in Naples?"

"I made a tour in northern Italy, fell in with some friends at Baveno, and did a little mountaineering with them in Switzerland. Since then I have been looking up my relatives, and am now leading a hermit's life in Bryanston Square. My father is spending two or three months at Bournemouth, and I am looking after some affairs of his which keeps me occupied," answered Will, as he accompanied them to the carriage.

"Well, at all events you will come and see us. We are at —— Hotel, in Albemarle Street. Come to luncheon to-morrow."

"Impossible; I go to Bournemouth to-morrow. Thank you for your kindness. When next you are in town I shall make a point of placing myself at your service."

Mrs. Medlicott and Ginevra arrived late in St. James's Hall, and with difficulty reached their places. A foreigner, with abstracted gaze and falling hair, hung over his violoncello in an attitude of inspiration. He played an adagio movement by Popper, the wailing notes now rising to a pitch of agony, now dying down into a wistful moan. It was the remorseful plaint of a lost spirit.

Ginevra, whose emotion had already been roused by her meeting with Will, felt herself plunged into a condition of dreamy sadness. Now the measure changed to a jocund strain, in which the notes quivered like leaves trembling in the wind, or sunbeams dancing upon the ground. Suddenly it ceased

in an abrupt chord. Then followed a trio; a piece on the pianoforte, all thunder and lightning; a plaintive violin solo. And then Ginevra became aware that a pair of dark eyes, gazing out of the dimness of the orchestral stalls, were fixed upon her face. She knew those eyes. She had last seen them misty in the agony of farewell, as she had ridden away through the eucalyptus trees at Birrali.

Mother and child strained dumbly towards each other over the gulf of softly moving heads. Gas and daylight mingled, deepening the unreal impression; and all the time the wailing music sounded, though Ginevra was only conscious of it as the accompaniment of a dream.

At last the concert was over, and Mrs. Medlicott, with a hurried injunction to her companion to keep close, got up and pressed her portly frame through the throng. But Ginevra lingered. She watched her mother rise. She stretched forth her hands—unavailingly. Clémence, apparently resolved to avoid the young girl's glance, quitted the semicircle without sign.

Ginevra darted from the concert-room in the doubtful hope of intercepting her at one of the outlets. Fortune was kind. As she passed though one of the swing doors she perceived the slim figure in black, helplessly wedged behind it, and the eyes of mother and daughter again met. But in those of Madame Dessolles there was a hard gleam which spoke no sign of recognition. A rift in the moving mass enabled Ginevra to press forward, then back. She seized Clémence's hand. Excitement and sickening anxiety had turned her face very pale, and for a moment she panted, unable to speak. The hand was wrenched from hers, but she regained and held it fast.

"*Mother!*" she whispered passionately, "I have found you, and I will not let you go."

"Hush!" cried Clémence, writhing in her effort to be released. "You don't know what you are saying. Did I not write to you that you must shun me—never try to speak to me? Did I not bid you think of me as one dead?—I *am* dead—to you, dead—dead. Do you understand, Ginevra? Let go my hand."

"Mother, mother, I cannot! I love you!"

"It would be better far if you hated me. Listen to me." Clémence bent towards Ginevra's ear, and whispered in a voice harsh from the anguish she was enduring—"*You must*

never again try to approach me. You must forget that I live. Your father commanded that we should be kept apart. I broke my promise to him before; it is my duty and yours to obey him now. I can do you no good—only harm. You do not want me: you are rich, prosperous, happy. What can *I* be to you? If you were poor and forsaken and wretched as I am, then *we might* comfort each other. When—if ever—you are forsaken and in misery, come to me, and you shall see what wealth of sympathy I have to give. But till that time comes—and I pray God it may never come—leave me to bear my wretched fate alone. Do not tempt me to transgress a second time the commands of one to whom I owe much. There is room in the world for us to go our separate roads. I do not wish to look upon your face again. You are my living punishment, my living woe—for I love you. Ah, God! I love you."

In the blankness of her amazement Ginevra's hold relaxed, and by a quick movement Clémence shook herself free, and glided out into the street dark with November gloom. Ginevra stood alone in pained bewilderment. In her hand there was a little object which had remained when her fingers had loosened on those of Clémence. It was a leather purse.

Presently her arm was lightly touched. The footman had been searching for her, and now despaired of attracting her attention. He told the coachman afterwards that she looked as if she had seen a ghost. She followed him to the carriage and got in almost blindly. Mrs. Medlicott was tired and cross, but Ginevra sat perfectly silent all the way home.

When she had reached her own room she took out her mother's purse from her muff, where she had hidden it, and examined it carefully. It contained but little money—only a half-sovereign and some silver, but it held a note-book, in which some rough household memoranda were pencilled, and two or three visiting cards, with this name engraved—

MADAME DESSOLLES.

and underneath an address written—

4, Holborough Terrace,
Earlscourt Road,
Kensington.

PART III.

PASSING THROUGH THE FIRE.

CHAPTER I.

OSCAR.

A FEW days later the Medlicotts and Ginevra left London with the intention of remaining in Woodfordshire till the middle of January, when it had been arranged that the marriage of the latter should take place.

Sir Michael and Lady Gilmore had, after repeated invitations, at last appointed a time for visiting Champneys Accompanied by Rosamond Churchill, they were to arrive a day or two after the Medlicotts' return. Will Cassilis had been invited also, but had refused. Other guests were expected; several county neighbours, of whom the male portion had a full appreciation of the Champneys' coverts, while their wives and daughters entertained a feminine wish to become better acquainted with the young bride elect. Having a view to the interchange of hospitalities, these ladies felt also a strong desire to ingratiate themselves with Lady Gilmore, and to find favour in the eyes of Sir Michael, whose predilection for "charming women" had, before his slavery to gout and hypochondria, caused Fretterly to be reckoned one of the gayest houses in the county. One or two stray London men, who openly regretted the appropriation of the Australian heiress, completed the party.

Brian, detained by his lawyer in London, was not to join his family till after they had been a day or two in the company of his *fiancée*. To him also, at that time, an episode occurred which was of the deepest import to his future.

As his marriage approached, he became more and more closely haunted by that troublesome demon of remorse, which the thought of his children evoked. And these thoughts had been frequent of late. His lawyer's office was near Bloomsbury; and in one of the large old-fashioned squares of that region stood the school where his son had been placed.

In his almost daily walk he passed within sight of the house. Upon this particular day, impulse, instinct, compelling presentiment, he knew not what, led him towards the building itself. As he paused outside the high brick wall which enclosed the playground, he could distinctly hear the shouts of the children within. His heart throbbed guiltily. An indescribable feeling of softness and longing crept over him. Nature was speaking in his breast.

It was too peremptory a voice to be disobeyed. Without pausing to reflect or to analyze his motive, or indeed to inquire if he had any motive, Brian rang and asked to see Oscar Dessolles.

He was shown into a shabby parlour, of which the unloveliness smote him keenly. A master came; the principal was not at home. Brian stated his wish anew, and presently the boy was brought to him touzled and flushed from his play. The child's clothes were shabby—the uniform peculiar to the establishment had been doffed for cricket or football—his little wrists were bare, his trousers had shrunk above his ankles, and his jacket, neatly mended here and there, seemed shrunken at the waist, giving the boy altogether an appearance of forlornness, almost of squalor. In spite of the lingering trace of enjoyment which his late occupation had called forth, his face had a wistful, old-fashioned look, and wore an expression of grave alertness, as though it were evident to him, even thus early, that life held difficult problems and warring forces, against which it behoved him to be on the defensive. Otherwise he was a handsome, manly little fellow, with his father's dark eyes and straight features. Brian noted the resemblance, and there thrilled through him a spasm of pity and regret.

"Come here, my boy," he said, with an effort at cheerfulness, though his voice shook; "come and tell me all about yourself."

Oscar advanced, then hesitated, and warily observed this stranger. To be visited was no common occurrence with him.

"Don't be afraid to come to me," said Brian, persuasively. "I knew you long ago, when you were much smaller—before you came here. I dare say that you don't remember me; but I remember you. Tell me what you have been playing at."

"'Rounders,'" answered the boy promptly, and twirled his little cap, letting it fall upon the ground. "We don't play at much else here. There isn't room for real good cricket. Do you know a game called *Hunt the Hare?* I should like to play at that," he continued, reflectively. "There's a boy here—George Cummins; his father is a farmer. He can hunt all through the fields. That must be rare going, mustn't it? I wish I lived where there were fields." Then the large fearless eyes wandered to Brian's face: "I don't know who you are, sir; when Mr. Bowles said that a gentleman had come to see me, I thought it might be Dr. Cassilis again."

"Does Dr. Cassilis often come to see you?" asked Brian, sharply.

"Oh no, hardly ever. He didn't come once for a long time. But he was here last week, and gave me a sovereign to buy a bat. Mother Bowles took it, and Joe Lush says that he's certain she bagged half of it."

"I will give you something that you will like better than a bat," said Brian.

The child moved closer to him.

"My name is Oscar," he said, confidentially, "and my mamma's name is Madame Dessolles. What is yours?"

"Never mind mine, it does not matter. Go on telling me about yourself—and your mother."

"She went away too for a long time. But she is back again now, and comes to see me very often, and I'm let go home sometimes on Saturdays. She has got a new house, but I don't like it much; I'd like to live in a place where there are sheep and cows and birds, and plenty of room to run about; it's so dark here. One day mother took me and little Jenny to the Zoo. Jenny cried when the lions roared. I liked hearing them. Have you ever seen the kangaroos? My mother says that she knows the country where they come from. Shouldn't I like to hunt them there—just!"

"Oscar," said Gilmore, catching at a suggestion which presented itself, as to the boy's future, "should you like by-

and-by, when you are a man, to live in Australia, and have a farm with a great many sheep and cattle?"

"It would be jolly," assented Oscar, enthusiastically. "I could hunt the kangaroos then."

There was silence between them. Gilmore's aptitude for careless prattle, which made him usually a favourite with children, seemed to have deserted him in the presence of this one. He drew the boy within his arm, and a strange thrill ran through his frame at the contact. Then he lifted the young prematurely wise face and awkwardly kissed it. Suddenly Oscar asked—

"Have you any boys? Are you a kind papa to them?"

He waited for an answer; Gilmore only shook his head.

"I have no papa," the child went on, his open wistful eyes gazing at Brian, and stabbing by their unconscious reproach; "at least I don't know where he is. Perhaps he is up in heaven. Several of the boys here have fathers who are dead, and Joe Lush's Aunt Annie takes him sometimes to see his dad's grave. But I don't know whether my dad is dead, for no one ever takes me to see his grave, and when I ask, nobody will tell me anything about him."

"Perhaps it is better for you that you do not know your father," said Brian, and the harshness of his voice grated upon his own ear. "He might be a bad man, or he might not be kind to you, or there might be reasons which would compel him to keep away from you. On the whole it is far better that you should think of him as dead. Now, I said that I would give you a present. I should like you to choose something which would be of use to you. Tell me what you would like best in the world."

"Are you rich?" asked Oscar, gravely. "People must have plenty of money to make presents of nice things. My mamma used to be very poor. She says that she is a little richer now; but we are going to save all the shillings we can, for it takes a great many shillings to make two hundred pounds. Mamma says that when we have got two hundred pounds I shall go to another school. She doesn't like this one; she thinks that Joe Lush teaches me rude ways."

"Your mother is right," said Gilmore, constrainedly. "You are too old now to do well here. We will see about sending you to another school. Where does your mother live?"

"Oh, a long way from this part," said Oscar. "The address is Holborough Terrace, South Kensington; but you go by undergound railway and get out at Earlscourt Road Station."

"Well," said Gilmore, "you have not told me yet what sort of present you would like best. Do not be afraid to ask."

"I should like a watch," promptly replied Oscar.

Impulse again swayed Gilmore. He detached from its swivel a locket which he wore, one containing a miniature of Ginevra. An agony of remorse and shame made him wince as though the trinket had been hot iron. Before him stood the innocent boy, with his wide unabashed eyes, seeming to accuse dumbly; afar, he beheld the girl-bride pointing as it were upward to a radiant heaven, too pure, it must be, to shelter a soul blackened as his own. What madness of presumption to have dreamed that he could grasp bliss so ineffable! Better perhaps that he should renounce the love which had made him man, and sink back into the mire of baseness from which he had been lifted.

He sighed heavily as he hid the locket away; then taking off his watch and chain he handed them to the boy. The watch was of plain gold, with a monogram engraved on its reverse side.

"If I were to make you a present of this, should you know how to take care of it till you went home, and could give it to your mother to keep for you? When you were old enough, you might wear it always."

The boy's eyes sparkled with delight. "I think I should just. But I did not mean yours, sir. I thought you might perhaps give me a white watch like the one Joe Lush has. He is older than me, ever so much, and he wears it on Sundays. It was his dad's."

Brian winced again. The cause was double. It was evident that Joe Lush towered in Oscar's imagination. At all hazards the boy must be rescued from companionship such as this.

"A yellow one is a great deal better," he said. "Gold is more valuable than silver, and you will like this all the more by-and-by, I hope, because it was mine." Involuntarily his voice softened almost to tenderness. "You are a big boy, Oscar,—nearly ten years old,—so I will trust you to take care of it now; and when you are older you will wear it always,

and let it remind you of the person who gave it to you, and who, you must try to think, felt kindly towards you."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Oscar—you have got a sister?"

"You mean Jenny? Only, mammy generally calls her by her long name. She is a little thing."

"Be kind and gentle to her. Put her pleasure before your own. Fix it in your heart that it is a man's duty to be brave, and honourable, and self-denying towards women. And your mother—be a good son to her. Make it your first duty to spare her pain, to study in all respects her wishes and her happiness. Remember that she has only you to take care of her. Do you understand, my boy?"

"Yes, sir; I'll try to be good."

Brian kissed the boy again, and looked at him—at his shabby clothes, his upright little figure, his high-bred face, with its solemn unconscious expression—feeling a strange mixture of yearning and repulsion. He rose hastily. His mind seemed a battle-field of contending emotions. Oh, for the power to drug memory and wipe away the stains of a sinful past! What punishment more terrible than when a sin takes bodily form and confronts the sinner? He thought of the happy English home awaiting him, and groaned in spirit and flesh; for the very thought of his entrance therein seemed the desecration of a holy temple.

His last look at the boy, who stood delightedly fingering the new possession, aroused a storm of irritation and self-hatred. Why had he come? Why had he made a gift which would to Clémence furnish a means of identifying her son's visitor, and set old wounds bleeding afresh? The whole proceeding had been inconsistent, ill-judged, possibly calamitous. It was in his mind to go back and recall the present. And yet it seemed dastardly to fling aside this responsibility, which forced itself upon him and was indeed inseparable from that difficult rectitude towards which he was striving. This he realized, that in strife and remorse lay his hope of purification; yet how reconcile these promptings, struggles, agonies, with the redemption which Ginevra's love had once appeared to offer him?

He walked away heavy with misery.

He resolved that before his marriage—now, at once—he would take steps to ensure a provision for, and the proper bringing up of the two children.

For this end he would consult with Will Cassilis, who had formerly had to do with the adjustment of his relations with Clémence.

He called at the house in Bryanston Square, only to learn that Will was with his father at Bournemouth, and not expected to return till the day after that upon which he himself had arranged to be at Champneys.

CHAPTER II.

CLÉMENCE WRITES.

With the income which Brian Gilmore had allotted her, Dr. Rolt's legacy, and the interest of a small fortune lately inherited from a scarcely known French relative, Clémence Dessolles felt herself to be in a state of comparative affluence.

Her material welfare was assured. In connection with it, two wishes were uppermost in her mind. To signify to Gilmore that she had no need of his money, which since her return to England a feeling of honour towards her dead husband had caused her to scrupulously abstain from using; and to remove her son to a school of higher grade, where he would be better educated and more directly under her control.

Both these projects were feasible enough, yet she shrank from definite movement with regard to either. Underlying all superficial thought and action, there burned, volcano-like within her, the longing to see and speak with Brian; and now, since the visit of the latter to Oscar, the gift of his watch, and apparent interest in the child's future, a hope that his old love might have revived, and that he might be vaguely contemplating some scheme of reunion, was ceaselessly present with her. She had eagerly interrogated her son, and had made herself acquainted with every minute particular of the interview; even the injunction to Oscar to treat her with respect and tenderness, and the half-reference to a career for the boy in Australia. Her wild thoughts leaped even to marriage as a possible termination to these years of silence and wretchedness. Her heart beat high. She was like a girl again in her tremor of longing and anxiety. When she

turned upon her pillow in the morning, she whispered to herself, "He will come to-day." At night she lay down weary and disappointed.

She had small ground for hope. On the contrary, reason and experience told her that an unlawful love is quick to burn out, slow to revive. But what the soul and body intensely crave, the mind comes to conceive as a thing that may be. And with Clémence there was always the lurking fancy that Oscar might represent an incalculable weight, which thrown into the scale would turn the balance as she ardently desired; of the girl, who had been born after her father's departure for Australia, she made less account. Mentally, she went over all imaginary possibilities, considered all unlikely channels, in which Brian's wishes or intentions might flow. His return from Australia with a rapidly gained fortune which would do away with all pecuniary difficulties; the death of his father or brother; his accession to the family property; desire for an heir; inextinguishable affection towards herself—she speculated upon every possible mainspring, save that most natural one—remorseful tenderness towards wronged offspring. Finely wrought, egotistic persons find it difficult to assign to those in whom they are powerfully interested, any motive entirely without reference to themselves. Brian's desertion at a time when she had strong claim upon his pity, and the lapse of five years, which, looked back upon, seemed a chaos of desolation, had not uprooted Clémence's infatuation. She was weary, bitter, resentful—often well-nigh desperate; the appetite for excitement had departed, leaving only a taste of ashes; but that one supreme passion of her being consumed it still.

Such was the inner life. Apart from this sleepless fret and desire which no reason could drug, she led the quietly ordered existence of a young matron of slender means and refined tastes, whose keenest sympathies might have been supposed to centre in her children—supervising her little girl's lessons and recreations; partly occupying herself with the care of the child's wardrobe; and devoting time to the tendance and arrangement of her pretty little house and the direction of her one maid-servant.

But now that she knew Brian was within reach, that at any time she might see his face, hear his beloved voice, neither mind nor body could taste rest. Though she told

herself confidently that he would come, she must still write to hasten his coming. Perhaps he shrank from presenting himself a suppliant before her. Perhaps he dreaded her resentment. Nay, he need not fear anger or reproaches. One look, one word, one smile tender as of old, and she would be as wax in his hands. Cruel! cruel! Ah! did not his own heart speak for hers? But they must meet, as it were, on neutral ground, and for this she would make the way easy.

Thus she wrote:

"4, *Holborough Terrace,*
Earlscourt Road,
Jan. 8th, 18—

"*Events have occurred which make me anxious to relieve you of the burden of supporting me and my children. I have no longer need of the income which you directed to be paid to me.*

"*I write in ignorance of all concerning you, save that you have returned to England. I know that you have visited Oscar, and from this conclude that you feel interest in the boy's welfare. Am I right? If this is so, I have surely a claim to ask that you will consult with me as to his future; though I wish you to understand that neither he nor I can be pecuniarily dependent upon you.*

"*We parted abruptly. Since then I have suffered deeply. Let the past be forgotten in so far that there shall be no wrath or bitterness in our meeting. May we not talk together as friends for the sake of those to whom we both owe atonement? For the children's sake, come to me.*

"*C. D.*"

Knowing no other direction, she sent the letter to Brian's club.

* * * * * *

Brian arrived at Champneys late in the afternoon; and found the whole party assembled in the hall.

He had bidden the servant let him enter unannounced; and now stood for a few moments in the curtained doorway watching the scene which was to his eyes but a shadowy background to the form of his beloved.

During the railway journey from London he had been consumed by the feverish desire to behold Ginevra. They had been separated hardly seven days, yet he counted each moment

lost which was unsunned by her smile. His love was at this time entirely without the element of peaceful security. By no effort could he throw off a feeling of impending doom. Vain to assure himself that in a few weeks she would be his own, bound to him by a tie which humanly could not be broken. His restless dread when apart from her; the brooding sadness—often ineffectually disguised under a mask of cheerfulness, which in her presence shadowed his spirits—resembled rather the alternating moods of some stricken wretch who would fain grasp all that he might of bliss before it was snatched from him for ever.

Mr. Medlicott's guests were gathered in groups which, softly illumined by rose-shaded lamps, played upon by fitful gleams from the wood fire, and viewed against a background of sombre oak and faded tapestry, presented all the combinations suitable to an harmonious picture of English social life, as far removed as could be conceived possible from any suggestion of underlying guilt or tragedy.

Here and there was a glint of antique brass or rare china. Flowers bloomed in dusky corners. Books, newspapers, work—trifles of all kinds, littered lounges, and small tables. There was a pleasant gurgle of conversation, and soft rustle of women's garments. The post had come in, and Mrs. Medlicott was bemoaning to Lady Silverdene the defection of certain important personages who had been expected to grace a ball to be given shortly at Champneys. Lady Silverdene, on the strength of the Birrali races, and a general enthusiasm for Australia, had since her arrival in England assiduously cultivated Ginevra and patronized the Medlicotts. Light, life, and interest abounded. Only the still portraits of dead and gone Champneys seemed to simper and frown in sympathy with, or disapproval of, the surface frivolity.

Mr. Medlicott's portly figure formed the centre of a small group of gentlemen who were discussing the day's bag, the advantages of artificial pheasant hatching, the delinquencies of keepers, the migratory freaks of woodcock, and kindred topics, after the manner of Englishmen who hold sport and slaughter to be their most sacred duties.

Lady Gilmore, her jewelled fingers toying with an elaborate art pattern in crewels, conversed sweetly thereupon with a sister dowager.

A cluster of frank, fair-haired girls had collected in a

window recess, and were listening with bated breath to the last fashionable ghost story, which one of the London men was illustrating by appropriate gestures.

Rosamond Churchill turned over the leaves of *Punch*, and uttered cynical observations upon things in general for the benefit of the curate, who was making an afternoon call. Rosamond looked unhappy and alert. She watched Ginevra continually. There was a quiver as of pain upon her lips, and her talk had been of late more than usually caustic.

Sir Michael Gilmore reclined in his armchair, and paid discursive compliments to a young French widow, who was finding distraction in the subjugation of this elderly swain. But Sir Michael's thoughts were wandering to an argument anent the Channel Tunnel, which was in progress between the rector and an Indian general.

"*But*, my dear sir, the Channel Tunnel does away with our mercantile marine—our impregnability—the strength of England."

Sir Michael lifted his voice. "We must go back, general—in fancy—to the days when the Thames emptied itself into the Caspian. Let me refer you to the ordnance survey map of the period, and profit by the experience and sagacity of the Cave men" (aside to Madame d'Hérouel)—"No great effort of the imaginative powers—the general belongs to the bronze stone, river-drift period rather. Ginevra, my dear daughter-in-law that is to be, music soothes the savage breast; and it is at times the tendency of advanced civilization to relapse abruptly into barbarism. Sing something, my love."

Presently the tea was brought in. "Sweet Placidia" bestirred herself to salt judiciously the dyspeptic's specially prepared muffin. Hot cakes steamed on their tripod, which, remarked Madame d'Hérouel, might be said to represent the votive altar raised to that Anglo domestic divinity—the goddess of tea.

Ginevra, who at the piano had been softly singing Poe's ballad of "Annabel Lee," now rose and took up her position as Mrs. Medlicott's *aide-de-camp*. The light shone upon her face and form, irradiating her dress of clinging white, and the bunch of Christmas roses at her throat. Brian's eyes feasted upon her beauty. With the shadow of a crisis to come, there seemed to have fallen upon her a sweet serene gravity. As he watched the womanly grace, the blending of

childishness and dignity, with which she executed the trifling offices laid upon her, Brian mentally contrasted her with the wayward child, who scarcely more than a year ago had lured him on to that fantastic game with Destiny. It was as though a new soul looked out now from the shining eyes—a soul born of love.

The mournful refrain of her song—

"My darling—my darling—my life and my bride,"

hung in the air, piercing his ears, and deepening the melancholy which held him in thrall. He might almost have fancied himself a wandering spirit released from hell to add sevenfold to his tortures by the glimpse of an earthly paradise from which sin had barred him.

He shudderingly drew aside the curtain; the spell was broken; he came forward, and made his greetings, his entrance hardly observed in the buzz of talk and laughter. But Ginevra's smile was as the welcome of an angel.

CHAPTER III.

THE STALK OF DOOM.

THE drawing-room at Champneys opened into a smaller apartment—a favourite morning resort, and nominally appropriated by the mistress of the house. Beyond it, lay a conservatory, which nestled in the angle formed by the projecting façade and eastern wing of the building. In this wing was Ginevra's own sitting-room, its windows on one side looking upon a quaint yew-hedged garden, and with a door leading into the conservatory, which, with its wealth of semi-tropical flowers and foliage, suggested happy memories of Birrali.

She was fond of this little retreat, and had fitted it up, somewhat fantastically, it must be confessed, after her own taste. Here she had gathered such relics as she possessed of her former life. Her father's books were ranged in shelves along one side of the apartment; cases, containing specimens of spiders, reptiles, uncanny-looking monstrosities, filled the

recesses between the windows. In curious juxtaposition with these, hung photographs from the originals of Raffaelle's most celebrated Madonnas. An early English cabinet was surmounted by a collection of boomerangs, nulla-nullas, and other aboriginal weapons. A *dilli*, or bag of plaited grass, the farewell gift of King Combo of Birrali, reeking still somewhat of the odours of the camp, hung, filled with miscellaneous Australian products. An opossum-rug of vast dimensions, the memento of David and Nancy Gryce, was stretched before the fireplace. A string of emu eggs festooned the mirror. There was a piano littered with music. A camellia in full bloom reared its snowy blossoms above a mass of maiden-hair fern, in a *jardinière*. A richly framed cabinet photograph of Brian stood on a small table beside the couch, with a vase of violets before it, like the offering placed before a shrine. The doorway leading into the conservatory was twined by crimson passion-flowers.

As, after dinner that evening, Brian and Ginevra passed through into the maiden's sanctuary, she gathered one of the blossoms, and in an abstracted manner shred its petals.

"Another appeal to Destiny?" said Brian with mournful questioning.

"Oh no; Destiny has given me the best of all good gifts in her power. My fate is sealed; and, you know, happy lives, like peaceful nations, have no history."

"Then you *are* happy, Ginevra? You have no dread—absolutely no misgiving—in looking forward to the future? You confide your life to my care, with your mind undarkened by one shadow of doubt or anxiety. Put your hand in mine. Look into my eyes; and let me hear the assurance from your lips."

Ginevra obeyed, and repeated in tones as earnest as his own, "I give my life into your keeping, Brian, with the most perfect trust—the deepest joy."

"God requite me according to my deserts, if such trust be ever betrayed by me—if I guard not this treasure, as surely never man yet guarded the most precious of all earthly possessions. No; I am not afraid of myself. I am not afraid for you. Regret shall have no place in your thoughts; I *will* make you happy."

"Nay!" replied Ginevra, "I fancy that it is rather I who should distrust my power of giving happiness. You look so

sad to-night, Brian, so unlike your usual self. Are you quite well? Are *you* quite happy?"

"Well? No. I think not quite. Happy? Yes; after a disordered fashion. I am feverish—unquiet—haunted by a presentiment of—I know not what. It seems like the stalk of doom. Oh that I could forestall time, and carry you away to some lonely place! . . . Do you remember the plain at Birrali, Ginevra? And the lagoon with its lilies sleeping in the moonlight? And the Southern Cross dipping behind the crag? That is the solitude which I crave. The atmosphere of this house is oppressive. Do you like this crowd of smirking nonentities? Do you enjoy the hubbub they make?"

"Life seems to me very unreal just now, Brian; and these people are like gaily dressed actors upon a stage without a background."

"Strange that you, too, should have this feeling! With me of late it has been ever present; and the imaginary burden of sorrow and anticipated evil has seemed almost too heavy to be born. But I am glad not to be alone in my experience. The link which binds our souls in sympathy proves how fit and natural is our union; and painful sensation becomes almost pleasurable when shared with you. But my metaphysical sentiment is growing very far-fetched, Ginevra, and I disturb and sadden you. Tell me the arrangements for the week. What ghastly duties lie before us? I heard just now some talk of a dance. When does it take place?"

"Brian, have you forgotten? *My* ball which was settled in London; and which is fixed for the night after to-morrow!"

"The first signs of old age are loss of memory and a disinclination for active exercise. Forgive me, dearest. I am afraid that my present mood does not incline me towards such frivolities. But, after all, the prospect has its consolations, and I shall at least have an opportunity of waltzing with you before matrimonial etiquette forbids. Ginevra, shall you think me a churl if I leave you again to-morrow?"

"Unquiet spirit! But you will come back for the ball?"

"Certainly. I am going to London for the day only, and shall return in time for dinner. I shall not be missed." He walked to the window, unbarred the shutter, and drew aside the curtain. "See, the snow is falling thickly. Woodfordshire will be white to-morrow."

Ginevra moved to his side; and together they gazed forth into the night. Heavily and noiselessly the snow was dropping, cresting turret and ledge of stone, shrouding sodden lawn and void *parterre*, and cast off like foam from the swaying yews which closed in the garden. A ghastly moon pierced at intervals the heavily laden clouds; and shed a vaporous radiance upon the distant stretch of park and rise.

Ginevra shuddered, and clung closer to Brian. This was the first thick fall of snow which she had ever seen; and to her easily wrought imagination, quickened now by Brian's lately expressed fantastic apprehensions, these noiseless flakes seemed eerie messengers which dumbly prophesied woe.

"Let us go back to the others," she said sadly; "and try to catch the infection of their mirth. All are gay except we two, who have most cause to be so. Perhaps," she added wistfully, "our happiness is too deep for expression, or there may be a malevolent spirit here, who would fain turn our smiles into weeping."

"If that be so, it is Rosamond Churchill," replied Brian. "I dislike that girl. She once cherished a grudge against me, which has never been forgotten. Her baleful look chills my very heart."

Brian proved a true prophet. Upon the morrow the world was white, and sport an impossibility. Snow-drifts blocked the roads, and covered the hedges. Frost had followed the storm; fantastically shaped icicles hung from the eaves; the brooklets were congealed; the lake an expanse of ice; dead leaves coated with rime glittered in cold splendour; bare trees raised coral branches to the sky.

Ginevra had recovered her spirits, and with almost child-like zest was drinking in the wonders of a scene, to her so full of novelty. The other young people of the party were joyous as larks. Orders had been given that the lake should be swept; and the resources of the establishment in the matter of skates were being freely tested. The preparations for the ball were in progress. Mrs. Medlicott looked fussily anxious; a fresh importation of guests was expected that day; and she was only able to derive comfort from the reflection that the station being but five minutes' drive from the house, the bad weather would not interfere with arrangements already made. Speculation was quick-lipped. Would it

thaw? Would it snow? Was there a possibility of posts and trains being delayed? Could such evil fate befall as the ruining of the festivity of to-morrow night by slippery roads and snow-drifts?

Brian at the breakfast-table was rallied upon the attractions of London. The banter led by Rosamond Churchill held a concealed barb. She saw that he winced, and was merciless. But Ginevra smiled in happy confidence, playfully averring that she had entrusted him with an important commission. And he, knowing the thoughts of his heart, bore himself bravely, though a thousand knives were stabbing him as he bade her farewell. Never before had it been borne in upon him, with so overwhelming a sense of shame, that he had no right to touch her hands or press her lips, till he had made to the innocent wronged ones all the reparation which lay in his power; and had broken, as effectually as might be, the fetters his sin had forged.

When the dog-cart drove round, a group of laughing girls collected in the hall to wish him good-speed; and his last vision of Ginevra, as she stood, the central figure in a bevy of daintily clad, trimly belted maidens, wafting an adieu on her finger-tips, lingered with him while he journeyed moodily through the wintry world to London.

Dr. Cassilis had not yet arrived from Bournemouth. He was expected in town that afternoon.

Brian left a message to the effect that he would call later; then telegraphed to Ginevra that his return must be delayed till the following day. By that time he would have laid upon Will the immediate burden of his cares and responsibilities; action of some sort had become a necessity. Impossible to temporize longer with this accusing demon, at least there might be consolation in the knowledge that he had taken some step to rid himself of the companion which seemed with ghostly hands to hold him back from Ginevra's embrace.

As he walked through the frosty air, now even in London crisp and exhilarating, his burden sat less heavily upon his soul; and he felt some faint return of the buoyancy of youth. Unconsciously his mind wove pleasant images of the future. He found himself smiling tenderly at the visions of domestic bliss that his fancy evoked—the plan of foreign travel; the fitness of Little Fretterly as a setting for his jewel; the round of county duties—the dull social routine, once irksome, hence-

forth how sweet! Do we not all know how in saunters through silent park or crowded street, the mind, abstracted from outward surroundings, wanders on its own delicious path of tangled reverie!

Passing by the Serpentine, Gilmore halted to watch the gambols and listen to the prattle of a pair of eight-year-old twin brothers. These, clad sailor-wise, the embodiments of peace, love, and plenty, were feeding the swans which craned their graceful necks below the railings; and discoursed volubly to their governess upon the anticipated delights of a Christmas tree.

Gilmore went on his way. Why upon this morning did his sympathies vibrate so keenly at sight and sound of all God's creatures, so that the very crossing-sweeper to whom he tossed a coin became a representative of yearning humanity, and the beggar-woman who accosted him while she held up her squalid babe, a type of the eternal motherhood? Why—if not that he beheld, opening before him, the vista of a better and brighter future?

He entered a jeweller's shop in Bond Street, where he chose a bracelet for Ginevra—a flat band of pearls, with clasp encrusted by diamonds; thence he proceeded to Covent Garden, and ordered a bouquet meet to be borne by his beloved.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE GRIP OF DOOM.

"I seemed to move among a world of ghosts,
And feel myself the shadow of a dream."

It was four o'clock when Gilmore turned into his club.

There he found Madame Dessolles' letter. He knew the handwriting. Each little trick of penmanship recalled a memory, and seemed like a live thing stinging him anew. At first he dared not break the envelope, but stood like a man dazed, till becoming conscious of inquisitive scrutiny, he walked into the library, and opened and read the missive.

"*For the children's sake come to me.*"

Up started all his impulses bidding him obey the summons.

Crucificial agony would be sweet to him, could he so gain purification. That mingled feeling of remorse, repulsion, uneasy yearning towards those whom he had wronged, and desperate desire to inflict upon himself some species of punishment and humiliation, returned with tenfold strength. The impulse to act was compelling—irresistible—he would go.

Apart from the swaying of his own mood, he was sufficiently acquainted with Clémence's wilful, ill-regulated nature, to read between the lines of her carefully penned, almost formally expressed, letter. He knew full well, that having once learned that he was in England, she would never rest till she had obtained the interview for which she longed. In her importunities might lie danger for the future—the imperilling of Ginevra's peace. His intentions, which had once hovered over confession, had now completely altered their course. No returning shadows from the night should mar the radiance of this new dawn. He would brace himself to meet his fate. Not the bitterest reproaches, the most fiercely expressed resentment—or worse, the most tender entreaties of a forsaken woman, clutching in a last desperate effort at lost dominion—could decrease or intensify his own sense of guilt.

He went into the hall and ordered a hansom. Presently he was driving along Piccadilly, which looked strangely shadowy and unreal, with its flaring lamps, its misty moving figures, and almost silent roll of traffic. Again snow was falling, pedestrians huddled themselves in their wraps, treading quickly. Wan faces looked out from the shelter of arch or doorway. Rich men bowled along enveloped in fur-lined overcoats, heeding not their poorer brethren; virtuous matrons drove by, haughty, well pleased, and stolidly indifferent to the vice and misery which dogged their carriage-wheels; fair girls smiled softly to themselves at some swiftly passing recollection, their eyes meeting in sweet unconsciousness the wild gaze of some unfortunate sister between whom and them yawned a gulf broad and deep as hell.

All these ghastly contrasts and pitiful incongruities harmonized with the chords now vibrating in Brian's being. He leaned back in the cab, not heeding the fine snow which drove in upon him. All power of sensation seemed called to the task of nerving him for a scene which his imagination pictured as presenting the elements of ruthless tragedy.

At last the hansom stopped before a row of semi-genteel

houses, in one of the streets running at right angles with Earlscourt Road. All were built after the same suburban pattern. In each a miniature bow-window was faintly illuminated, and a narrow flight of steps led to the hall-door.

Gilmore descended and made his way to No. 4. His ring was answered by a neat, unsophisticated little maid.

Yes; Madame Dessolles was at home. Would he please to walk in? A door leading out of the small passage was indicated. Brian waited for the attendant to announce his name, which he had given; but she had disappeared, and he was fain to make his own entrance. He stood for a moment irresolute before the door. All was silence, save for a low crooning, which might have been the voice of a child at play. He knocked softly; there was no answer; then he turned the handle and found himself in a tiny, prettily furnished drawing-room, lighted by a shaded lamp, and the subdued glow from a half-burnt coal fire. The curtains were closed. A small table with tea upon it was drawn up before the hearth. On the rug, surrounded by a nursery of dolls, crouched a little girl of five or six, whose light brown hair seemed to catch reflections from the red embers. A lady, with face averted from him, sat in a deep armchair at one corner of the fireplace. Her head drooped languidly. On her lap idly lay a piece of work; her whole attitude betokened weariness and dejection. The child moved slightly, and her voice raised in expostulatory address to her doll—"You naughty thing, I want you to show off your train; stand up straight,"—seemed to rouse the mother, who almost unconsciously stretched forth her hand, and laid it on the child's head.

"Hush, dearest!"

The second during which this scene imprinted itself upon Brian's mind gave time for a startling revulsion of feeling. It was as though the tragedy for which he had been preparing himself had subsided into mere domestic commonplace. Here was nothing which could shock or revolt. No well-ordered English interior could have appeared more peaceful. And yet, when this impression had passed, the bitter pathos of contrast between what he saw and what he had expected struck his imagination, and brought to him a grim sense of unreality.

He made a step forward; his movement attracted the little girl.

"Mamma," she said, "here is a gentleman."

Madame Dessolles gave the start of one who is awakened from a dream by its fulfilment, and uttering a faint cry, turned a pair of wild eyes upon her visitor. She rose to her feet, facing Brian at the distance of a few paces. For several moments neither spoke nor made any advance. As Brian's eyes became acquainted anew with her face and bearing, he noted a change in both—an increase of dignity, a look of pride and resolution, strangely allied to a certain wistful pleading which commanded his respect and pity. He felt that from this Clémence he might dread no tempest of wrath. There was in her look and manner a subtle alteration which seemed to place their meeting upon a less tragic, a more conventional level.

Her beauty had not deteriorated, and it was enhanced by her old art in dress. Every day since the sending of her letter she had hoped against hope that Brian might come; each evening she had clad herself becomingly in order that she might never be seen at a disadvantage. The black velvet robe moulded itself to the outlines of her figure; the soft lace at her throat heightened the fairness of her complexion; the diamond brooch—Brian's gift—lent lustre to her dark eyes. Her hair was carefully arranged; every detail of her appearance had been studied. She had always shown a capacity for dramatic posing. Even now, as he looked at her, Brian could not repress a thrill of admiration. But it was succeeded by horror and fierce repulsion as he thought of the old glamour which had so utterly died away.

Retribution may descend in the shape of a sin clothed in its consequences, and the most terrible doom laid upon the lost spirits may be the backward revelation, link by link, chain by chain, of the far-reaching results of unworthy deeds.

Of such torment did Gilmore now experience a foretaste. Yet, underlying his anguish, there was excitement which made his nerves vibrate as to the crash of a destroying thunderbolt.

And as if revealed by the lurid vividness of lightning-streak, rose a horror not to be contemplated without blenching eyeballs and snapping heart-strings. It was impalpable, indefinable, yet hideously, loathsomely real. It took form in the woman who faced him. It revealed itself in the arched

brows, in the long glance, in the curve of nostril, in the droop of upper lip. . . .

* * * * * *

The little girl rose, her doll in her arms, and fixed her shallow eyes upon the stranger.

"Mamma," she said, pulling at her mother's dress, and pointing to Gilmore, "who is this gentleman? You should ask him what he wants here."

"Hush," said Clémence sternly. "Go back to your play."

She moved forward and held out her hand to Brian. It did not tremble; their fingers met, and her touch was to him as the searing of hot iron.

"I expected you," she said quietly. "I felt sure that you would come as soon as you heard from me."

"Your letter reached me only half an hour ago," replied Brian, and so ghastly was the mockery of the situation that he could almost have laughed at the frigidity of his own tone. "I found it at the club on my arrival from the country."

"Yes, I sent it to '*Arthur's*,'" said Clémence with equal tranquillity. "Some time ago I understood that you were not on good terms with your father, and that you seldom went to Fretterly."

"We are friends now," answered Gilmore absently. "But there is no need to go into that; I am here."

"And you would ask what it is that I require of you?" said Clémence in a tone of repressed vehemence. "You think me unreasonable perhaps in demanding an interview. Patience and long-suffering are the duties of women such as I; forgetfulness the prerogative of men like you. The world has taught me my lesson. Well, at least I thank you for coming," she added in a different tone; "you were always courteous."

She resumed her seat; her companion drew forward a chair, but her face was too much in shadow for him to observe its play of expression, if indeed it lost for a moment the impassible mask which seemed to conceal the workings of agitation.

The urn hissed and bubbled and sent forth a shower of spray. The child, wistful and wondering at having been rebuked for a curiosity which seemed justifiable, had gathered up her dolls, and stood with drooped head and inquiring eyes that wandered from Brian to her mother and to Brian again. Distracted now for the moment, she touched Clémence's arm and reminded her of the omission of her duties as hostess.

"Mammy, aren't you going to make any tea?"

So mingle the tragic and the commonplace.

Clémence moved, and with hands which trembled in spite of her resolution to make no sign, busied herself at the tea-table. She ministered first to the child's wants, then poured out and handed a cup of tea to Brian, while he drank it with almost the well-bred apathy of an afternoon caller. It seemed to him that a scene in some exciting melodrama, in which burlesque and horror grimly blended, was being enacted before his eyes, and that he, unconscious of absorbing interest therein, held aloof, a passive spectator, his mind utterly incapable of adjusting itself to the present unreal conditions of existence. Clémence, preserving her mask of quietude, watched the effect of her manner, determined that at this juncture no show of impetuosity should alarm or repel him. It was a consummate exhibition of tact impossible to maintain for many moments. Presently she sat down again and folded her hands in her lap, the fingers so tightly interlaced as almost to cause pain, a volcano, which sooner or later must burst forth, raging in her bosom.

The little girl approached Brian's knee, and after the manner of children held up her doll for his approbation. He shuddered. His first impulse prompted him to repulse the child; his next to draw her towards him and gravely kiss her. He looked across at Clémence in an appealing manner which roused within her all that there was of womanliness; their eyes met in painful understanding. It was more than her fortitude could support. She burst into an hysterical laugh.

"Oh, you ask too much of me," she cried in a sharp tone of despair; "I can bear no more. I am tired. I am sick. I can act no longer. Let this farce end."

"Send the child away," said Brian, "I have much to say to you. This interview is deeply painful to us both. It would have been better perhaps if we had never met again. Every word that you utter is a stab of which only God can know the agony. And words—words! What can they do for us? When everything that can be said is said, the hopelessness, the misery, the guilt remain. . . . Send the child away."

Clémence's eyes, illuminated by struggling hope, eager longing, had riveted themselves upon his face, searching as

it were into the very depths of his soul. She turned at his last words and addressed the little girl:

"Go, Ginevra. Take your dolls away and bid Ellen play with you downstairs. Do not come back till I call for you."

The child obeyed. Clémence and Brian were alone.

She turned towards him; an inarticulate murmur passed her lips. But again the gruesome spectre had risen. He started back like a man stricken by a hand not mortal. His face was livid; the veins in his forehead showed dusky red; his speech faltered. "My God!" he ejaculated. "What—what was that you called her?"

"Ginevra," replied she almost absently, her thoughts wandering past his question in alarm and wonder at the change which had fallen upon him.

"Why did you call her by *that* name?"

"It is one that I—" Clémence faltered too—"one that I am fond of. My mother bore it; and it was the name of my first baby—the baby I could never bear to speak of—whom I left in India."

Brian stood motionless, his eyes fixed in a sort of horrible fascination upon Clémence's face. Like a vision in distant paradise rose a fair image, standing forth mid flowers and greenery in the glory of a dying evening. The scent of roses floated towards him, and he heard a sweet voice saying, "I was born in India. . . ."

There came upon him a frightful sense of suffocation. A horror too swift for words, too swift to leave behind it any distinct impression, swept his being. He tried to speak, he tried to frame another question, but the hoarse murmur seemed to choke him and died in his throat. He moved a few paces, walking as one dazed. His hands were clammy; he felt giddy. Turning, he crossed to the fireplace, and leaned his elbow on the mantel-shelf, supporting his head, while he looked down upon Clémence. Oh, terrible naturalness underlying ghastly phantasies! The diamond brooch she wore caught the lamp's light; each flash of radiance was like the gleam from a threatening serpent's eye. He felt like one gasping in deep waters. The moment might have been compared to that last terrible second of existence, into which are compressed the bygone incidents of a lifetime. This thought smote him now. His memory had wandered to the day—the same when he had pinned the brooch in her dress.

. . And he knew that he was laughing in a kind of frenzy at a certain devilish suggestion. He was going mad. . . . He must be mad, or imagination could not have conceived a thing so awesome. . . . Retribution! Had he not gazed for an instant on the face of Medusa? Must he still hear the voices of her avenging sisters?

He straightened himself as might a drunken man endeavouring to ape sobriety, as a victim of delirium who would rid himself of the crawling spectres around him. He found a source of satisfaction in his ability to observe the arrangement of the room—the colour of the curtains, the fashion of the chairs, the vase of flowers on the table. He wondered stupidly whether any one had sent Clémence the flowers. Christmas roses! Where had he last beheld them? Oh mournful refrain ringing once more!

> "My darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
> In the sepulchre there by the sea,
> In her tomb by the sounding sea."

Who had sung that song? Had it rung in his ears in some peaceful past existence? . . . And then he tried to recollect what flowers were at this time abloom in Australia—and—was it all a dream?

Clémence was speaking.

"You do not remember. She was not born till after—afterwards." Her voice quavered.

He answered mechanically.

"No; I do not remember."

They were both silent for a moment. The wind had risen; it was moaning; the snow struck against the window-pane; a drop of sleet fell hissing upon the embers. Beating back as it were by an almost superhuman effort of his mind, the sharp suffocating atmosphere which closed in his being, Brian breathed once more and spoke.

"You sent for me. We have to decide upon the future of others, who, unlike the guilty sufferers, bear a penalty they have not earned. This meeting might be one after death. I would have you know that I am not utterly selfish—utterly heartless. . . . You—all that has come from my sin—pierce me with an abiding pain from which I can never escape. The only refuge would be callous indifference—but better far, torture. You say that you too have suffered. Do

I not realize your suffering tenfold—for my remorse must needs be greater than yours? We are under the same yoke. It presses heavily upon us both—upon you unjustly—I alone should bear it. But we cannot wrench ourselves from it. That is the despair—our punishment is not only upon our own heads. To each of us it involves others. The children—others besides the children."

Clémence leaned back in her chair and looked at him—a world of tragic intensity in her gaze.

"But—*are there others?*"

Brian shuddered.

"Yes; not to be spoken of—now. Tell me of yourself, your wishes, your plans for the future. Speak unreservedly. All that is in my power I will do. But first, let me say this. You thought it barbarous, inhuman of me to leave you, at such a time, without warning or farewell. Well, I was a coward—I was afraid to see you. I dreaded your influence over me; I reasoned myself into the belief that I was sparing you pain, and that one heavy blow would be easier to bear than slow stabbing. I wished to tear myself completely from the old life, to begin afresh under new auspices. A thousand necessities of which you were ignorant—for I had striven to hide my difficulties from you—pressed me on all sides. No other course seemed open to me. I had begged that this might be explained to you. I had hoped that you would understand my motives."

"Your friend came, and he explained; yes, he explained—shortly but clearly enough. He was kind. He preached no sermon, he only acted one. But words, motives, reasons, what were they to me? I was forsaken; and earth and heaven seemed blackness."

"I saw nothing before me—before us—but ruin," continued Brian. "Sooner or later our life, under its then conditions, must have ended. And I knew what sort of woman you were, and what penury would mean to you! I wished to spare you that while I was able. Separation from old ties was the stipulation my father made in helping me. I was a coward, a villain—I own it. But the worst wrong lay in the beginning. For that it was impossible to atone; that would have made a future together for us a dreary hopeless penance. To part from you seemed a duty; life in a new world, redemption."

"And I"—Clémence put out her hand, then drew it back quickly with a gesture of self-contempt; her eyes seemed to lose themselves in backward visions of misery—"I was left behind in the old world—a galling shackle broken—a flower withered and scentless—a glove soiled beyond power of cleansing. Oh, I know your cold sophistries. For a woman who has violated her claim to respect, existence is ended. For her, the scorn of the one, the charity of the multitude. For her, no hope of deliverance, no possibility of redemption." Her last words became a moan. She had lost command of herself. "Brian, you gave me a few short years of happiness; you leave me a lifetime of despair. Talk of *your* pain—*your* remorse. What is your suffering to mine? The waters are rising over me. I am sinking, deeper, deeper. *You* thrust me down. It is you alone who can save me."

Her cry pierced Brian to the soul. His agony might have been that of the remorseful murderer, who watches the dying throes of his victim, with the longing and the sense of inability to undo his deed.

Clémence went on, her words falling brokenly. She had lost the consciousness of their present relative positions. Every thought seemed merged in passionate self-pity.

"I was forsaken; I was without the pale. Life was colourless as the grave; love a mockery. Repentance had no meaning for me—for had you returned to me, I would have welcomed you, oh, how joyfully! No harsh words should have sounded in your ears, Brian. You should have heard nothing but tenderest tones of sweetness—you used to say my voice was sweet. . . . What could I do? I wished to die, but they would not let me; and I was too cowardly to go out at night and drown myself, as many a wretch less desolate than I has done. My children were my living reproach. The crying of the little one I had deserted sounded in my dreams, and in my waking drowned the voices near me. . . . There was nothing before me but shame and despair. The days were bitter, and the nights slow torture. Oh, the loneliness, the loneliness! My boy was sent to school. I was not a woman who could concentrate the purpose of a life upon an infant. I had never been sufficient to myself; feminine—domestic, I had always wanted love and sympathy. And you *had* given them to me. Why were you so kind, if afterwards you meant to be so cruel? A

hunger came over me to see you once more. And at last, I could endure it no longer. I went away——" She paused, and her brow puckered painfully, as though she were trying to retrace her thoughts.

"You went away," repeated Brian, recalling her to herself.

"I went to Australia, where I was told you had gone. The desire to be near you was like a magnet. It was a long journey. I was there more than a year, first in one colony, then in another. I had no clue to guide me—only a dim belief that God could not always mean me to be so wretched. I prayed to Him to lead me to you. I had not much money; and travelling there is difficult and expensive. But I went from place to place. I worked. I held myself aloof from all that was not good, so that I might never blush to say to you, 'Take me back again.' And now you will see how I loved you. I felt that it would make no difference even if you had ceased to care for me, so only that I might be with you. I who had always been capricious, wilful, difficult to please, was ready to be your slave. I knew that out there in the bush, it was a rough life. I had been told that a woman had it in her power to sweeten hardship. No work would have been too menial for me. . . . And I was once so fond of luxury and pretty things—I thought you would remember that, and be touched, and that you might think my love worth something to you after all. But I could not believe that you had grown tired of me. Once I could have made you do whatever I wished—and you had been fond of Oscar! I fancied that I might bind you to me through him. And it seemed to me that we might be happy, and make our lives in a free land where the forest was too wide for hard conventional laws to crush people down. I was determined that when I had found you I would never let you go—I resolved to make myself so necessary to you that in time it might come to be as though we had been married—and no one would ever know otherwise. I had heard of such things. . . . You see how little pride I have when I can tell you this. There's no pride left in me. If you were drowning, and saw a branch above your head, you would not be too proud to clutch it. That's how it is with me. I had meant to meet you so differently. I had meant to be cold, self-possessed at first—to act a part—to calculate the effect of every word and look. But I cannot; I am a mad, desperate woman with no

power to control my misery. Have pity! . . . I am sinking. Brian, save me. Brian, take me back again. For weeks I have lived in an agony of hope and dread. For days—since I learned that you had been to see Oscar—the anxiety has been almost more than I could bear. Oh, I am sick and weary. I have not slept for nights. I am worn out. I don't know what I am saying or doing."

She broke down completely; and putting her hands to her face sobbed piteously. The strain of the interview was becoming intolerable to Brian; but how to end it he knew not. He went back to the chair which he had quitted. The change of position seemed a relief. For some moments he watched her as she sobbed. Each sigh was like a knife piercing him. And yet, notwithstanding his pity and anguish of remorse, he felt that he hated her. He recoiled from the thought of touching her hand. To utter one word of sympathy was impossible. A deep groan escaped his lips. She looked towards him, her eyes streaming, her lips trembling.

"I—make you more unhappy," she murmured brokenly. "You are sorry, but oh, sorrow is a mockery—I—can't help crying. You could—you could change everything if you would."

"I can change nothing," said Brian in a voice dull and hard as iron.

Clémence's glance darted through him. Then she covered her face again and wept more unrestrainedly. The very life seemed drawn up in her gasps. To listen bound and helpless was anguish unsupportable. He bent towards her and said—

"I beseech you, try to be calmer. The worst pain becomes easier if we nerve ourselves to meet it."

He felt that he was uttering a mere platitude which smote his own ears with grim satire. But the words had effect. Clémence made an effort to command herself, and gradually her sobbing became less violent. At last, only at intervals her breast heaved, and she trembled like a child.

"You mean—you mean that you must give me pain."

"We have both to suffer," answered Brian in the same far-off tone.

She gazed at him fully, searchingly, with mournful solemnity. "But you could marry me," she said; "my husband is dead."

CHAPTER V.

THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.

CLÉMENCE uttered these words with desperate abruptness; while her long gaze, narrowed by intensity, remained fixed in agonized inquiry upon his face. Then, seeing that Brian did not meet her look, or make any advance towards her, she continued in a tone of imploring explanation which gathered strength as she proceeded.

"It is true. He died in Australia a year ago—in Leichardt's Land. I had seen him. I had followed him to his home among the mountains where he lived alone with his daughter —*my* eldest born. Ah me! ah me! It is he who has left me money. That is why I said, 'I will not be dependent upon you any more except in the one way which is my right.' I *must* speak. If I speak vehemently, it is because I am goaded by desperation. Are you completely lost to honour? Have you forgotten the promise you made me long ago, and which you renewed after Oscar's birth? You know that marriage is my right; and for the sake of my children I claim it."

She had half risen. In her excitement she stretched forth her arm, he scarcely knew whether in menace or pleading. He laid his hand upon it and placed her again in her chair. It was the first time he had voluntarily touched her.

"If what you wish were possible, it should be my atonement. Yes," he added fiercely, as if speaking to himself, "it should be my expiation. But"—and his voice dropped to a horror-stricken whisper—"it is not possible."

"Good God!" she exclaimed, shaking off his hand. "Don't torture me any longer. Tell me at once that you are married."

"I was—I had intended to be married."

A change like the grey stillness which follows sunset passed over Clémence's face. Emotions, will, seemed to collapse. She sank back in her chair, and there was great quietness in the room. At first he thought that she had fainted, but the quivering of her lips and eyelids told him that she suffered consciously. The fire gave out a flickering flame; then that died away. The snow still beat against the pane. The

muffled roll of carriages passing without, was painfully audible. At last she raised her arms in a convulsive movement, and let them fall nervelessly.

"I am a wretched woman," she cried. "My sin is its own punishment. I am forsaken. I am supplanted. What is left for me but to die? And *you* may live on in happiness, whilst *I* must sink down—down in despair!" . . .

Again there was silence. He got up and walked away from her. Hours seemed concentrated in moments. Presently he knew that she was speaking once more, now in a tone of piteous pleading, which made him wince, like the probing of a nerve.

"But *are* you happy?" she was saying. "*Can* you be happy? No; never, never. I know that you are miserable. I see it in your eyes. Your voice betrays what you are feeling. It is not only my pain which moves you. Your suffering is deeper-seated—more poignant than remorse. There is a strange look upon your face; you have some terrible thing upon your mind. . . . Will you then forsake me, Brian? It is I who have the first claim—I and my children. Why do you not speak to me? Have you been turned to stone? . . . Is the choice so hard? Must you rend your very heart before you can reply? Will you forsake me? Must you wrench your life from mine? Must all the past be as though it had never been?"

Her voice vibrated. Eyes, lips, attitude pleaded. She was an image of passionate beseeching. And again he beheld the Medusa-like horror.

"It is my curse that I cannot wrench you from my life," he exclaimed, with deep bitterness.

She recoiled, hardly knowing what construction to place upon his words. He stood over her, and spoke rapidly and hoarsely.

"There is more which you must tell me. You say that you saw your husband—in Australia. You say that he lived with his daughter—Where? I *must* know all the truth. Do you hear? Collect your thoughts. Take your mind back to Australia. Tell me of your husband—your daughter."

Shaken as it were out of her agitation, Clémence obeyed, by an effort directing her memory.

"I said that he was dead. Some strange fatality led me to him and to my daughter. Yes, it was in Australia. I will

tell you all as well as I can. I was lodging in a little house by the river—in Leichardt's Town. During all those months I had not been able to find you. I had been to the diggings. I was weary—heartsick. In my despair I said that I would wander no more. One summer's night I sat alone brooding over the past, and thinking of my child who must have grown to womanhood—picturing her in imagination, wondering whether they had ever told her of me, or if she had been taught to hate the name of mother. Suddenly the fancy took shape: a face peered in at me from the window. Eyes, lips, brow thrilled my memory. I knew not if it were flesh and blood, or if it were a vision sent to bid me hope; but this I knew, that it was the face of my child. . . ."

Clémence paused, her gaze fixed on space as though she would recall the image.

"Go on," said Gilmore.

Clémence sighed heavily.

"The next day I was about to cross the river in the ferry-boat, when a lady and a young girl took their seats. The girl was very beautiful. She had the face of my vision. My eyes met hers. My heart seemed to speak. It said, 'This is your child.' And when her companion called her Ginevra, doubt became almost certainty. I watched her to the house where she was staying. Early on the following morning I saw her drive away. She was with her father, and in him I recognized my husband. He had changed his name. They called him Dr. Rolt. I learned that he lived among the mountains at a place called Birrali. Thither I followed him. It was a lonely spot—fit dwelling-place for him. He had not greatly altered. I saw the same dull, cold abstraction—ice would have been warmer—stone more human. Books and science had been the food of his life; they sufficed him still. I would not have stolen unawares upon him had I not craved to see my child. I entreated, humbled myself—to no purpose. . . . But I would not be wholly denied. I watched and waited, hiding myself behind a rock on the road by which I knew that she must pass. And down the hills she came riding, and paused by the stream at my feet. I held her in my arms, and kissed her lips, and wept upon her bosom; but I dared not tell her that I was her mother. . . ."

Clémence's voice broke suddenly, and her thoughts went wandering in some mental labyrinth to which there was no

clue. These fragmentary recollections had fallen from her as though she were pursuing a succession of inward images rather than the actual course of events. A deep shuddering ejaculation, "My God, have mercy upon me!" startled her as though it had been a voice from the grave.

Gilmore had risen, and was staggering forward like a man who had been stricken to death. Clémence stretched forth her arms to him, uttering a cry of terror.

"Oh! what is it? what have I said?"

Gilmore flung her away with a gesture of loathing.

"Don't touch me. Don't speak to me. Let me go."

"You will leave me?" cried Clémence in anguish.

"Don't speak to me," he repeated. "I must think. I must be alone. I want air." He was moving blindly. Swiftly she placed herself before him, barring his passage.

"You must *think*," she repeated in accents of scorn. "I tell you that you shall not leave me till you have decided which is to be forsaken—this woman or me—this innocent girl probably, whose purity is her attraction for *you*. Oh! do I not know Society's false soulless creed, which sets forth one law for the woman and another for the man, which will gaily bedizen dishonour with marriage gauds, and accept liberal settlements as the price for absolution? Think! It was never your habit to waver between conscience and desire, to balance conflicting claims, conflicting duties. Better far had it been so. Are we to be put in the scales, this girl and I? Would you consult a fashionable high priest, or take advice from your prospective mother-in-law, who would cast down her eyes, laud your scruples, and point with modest finger to the path of virtue and the altar, with her daughter for your guide? Oh, I know your world!"

"Silence!" said Brian, the word falling like a drop of lead, while she quailed before, though she could not comprehend, the fierce repulsion which held his eyes averted. "Since you *will* be answered—for me, marriage with you, or another, would be the commission of a horrible, unnatural crime."

"What do you mean?" gasped Clémence.

She had shrunk back; and he, impelled by dread lest he should betray himself further, and too hardly pressed by conflicting feelings to reflect how far she might realize the true terror of the situation, would have passed her by, and there and then fled her presence for ever.

But her brain was already whirling in rapid conjecture. She flung herself upon him, and dragged him to the light, clutching his arm so that he could not shake her off.

"*Who* is this girl?" she cried. "What is she? Speak. I *must* know. Is that her portrait that you wear?"

She seized the locket which hung from Brian's watch-chain. In the effort it came apart from the ring to which it was attached, and remained loose in her hand. She turned toward the lamp, and with frenzied eagerness touched the spring. It flew open and displayed a woman's face, wistful and innocent as that of a child.

The locket dropped from Clémence's hold and rolled away on the carpet. Never in one second had woman's features become so wan and frozen. She moved away and staggered blindly against a chair. There was a terrible look in her eyes, which were vacantly fixed upon him. Her lips were parted in the effort to speak, but only a voiceless murmur came forth. At last he could distinguish the words uttered stammeringly, "You said—you said. . . . We are both accursed. . . ."

Her voice died in an inarticulate groan. She motioned him away. He obeyed, and reached the door, then hesitated. Was she going mad? Would she kill herself?

"You are ill. I cannot leave you like this."

But she repeated her gesture of dismissal, this time more imperiously.

"Go," she repeated, in that harsh inward voice.

Brian left her.

When he had closed the door he stood for a moment irresolute in the hall. Clémence's maid passed him as she came down from above, and in grim contrast to the tragic scene which he had gone through, he could hear the little girl laughing merrily in her mother's room upstairs.

Brian called the servant to him, and going towards a gas jet, wrote with laborious legibility an address upon a card which he had taken from his pocket-book.

"Listen," he said. "Are you a good girl? Can I trust you? Yes, I think that I can. You look as though you had some sense, and a kind heart. You are to sleep to-night in a room close to your mistress. You are to watch her carefully for the next day or two. I think it possible that she may be ill. If she seems so, or says or does anything to frighten you, you are to send at once to the gentleman whose address is

written here. He is a doctor. If she talks or acts in any way strangely, send at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," stolidly replied the girl, fixing upon him a look of intelligence, which he accepted more readily than he was warranted in doing as a guarantee of her trustworthiness. He slipped a piece of money into her hand, and she let him forth into the snowy night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST GLIMPSE OF PARADISE.

"Tragedy lies in the encounter of a powerful individual Will, conscious of a purpose, with the rational, Universal Will."

But what to do? whither to go? How to escape from the fiends which walked by his side, turning the streets into hell?

A devil's voice whispered, "Go back and hold thy peace." The words hissed in his ears. He knew they were of Satan, yet he hearkened, and like the madman whose uncontrollable impulse leads him to the contemplation of acts which his soul abhors, Brian reasoned against himself, and framed specious arguments by which he might be justified in iniquity.

And while the conflict raged, he wandered on, knowing not whither. The falling snow struck chill; in that at least there was relief. He was conscious of muffled sound, and could have prayed that it might intensify, and deaden the voices which, within or without, he could not tell, importuned with their sickening suggestions. The gas lamps seemed leering eyes seeking his own: the men and women who passed him shadows to be evaded; yet, withal, there was an intense consciousness of his own personality, and he felt himself the pivot upon which the very universe turned.

Was he not a victim, fate-driven like they of the old Greek drama, doomed to be mere passive instruments in the hands of the gods? What countless trivial incidents had combined to lure him to destruction! A day sooner, a day later, the chance of an accident, the whim of a moment, and he and

Ginevra had never met. The path that they had trodden, strewn with roses, upon which angels had seemed to smile, had led them thus through the gloom of guilt and horror into regions of blackest tragedy. Involved in the same mysterious web, bound by the same chain, lashed alike by dire necessity, their hearts indissolubly united—let them then stand apart from the sympathy and fellowship of mankind. Let them defy the laws of humanity, and embrace their unnatural destiny!

Oh, drear fatality! inexorable mandate which decreed the martyrdom of the innocent! Must his be the voice to make known the sentence; his the hand to raise the knife by which the heart's blood of his best beloved should be shed?

He knew, alas! too well, that the love which Ginevra had vowed to him was not the changeful fancy of a girl, but the devotion of her whole being, the very essence of her existence.

Might not he alone bear the burden of this hideous revelation? Must Ginevra's young life be blighted, all the fresh springs in her nature petrified, all her tender womanly instincts paralyzed? Must she—the guiltless one—be laid upon the altar of this hateful Moloch, and be sacrificed at the demand of a ruthless Fate? Then, with stunning force the awfulness of his position smote him. The earth reeled; the air became black. He was compelled to lean for support against the abutting pillar of a house which he was passing.

He might have remained there for minutes, or for hours; he knew not how long. The sense of time had gone from him. A woman's light touch roused him to consciousness; and he met a pair of honest eyes gazing into his with kindly curiosity. Their owner was a respectably dressed person, with something pathetic in her expression; and in her arms she carried a child of two or three, whose sleeping face was partly visible between the folds of the cloak in which it was wrapped.

"I thought that you might be ill, sir," said the woman, drawing back when she perceived what manner of man she had accosted. "I beg your pardon."

Brian thanked her, murmured something about a passing giddiness, and went on his way.

Mother and child! The mental image which this outward vision conjured up solemnized, and in a comparative manner restored his tranquillity. Thus it is that in supreme crises of

our moral lives, the mere momentary contact with what is essentially human, may restore the balance of instincts which violent temptation or temporary insanity have for a short time threatened to disturb.

He had wandered down the dreary length of Cromwell Road, and now emerged into a region more densely thronged and brilliantly lighted. The snow had ceased falling; and Brian became conscious that he was numb with cold. He had afterwards a confused recollection of having entered a gin-shop and of swallowing some spirit, which so far stimulated his faculties as to enable him to hail a hansom and give the order to be driven to St. Pancras. Then had come the dreamlike waiting at the terminus, and the pacing to and fro of the platform—for movement seemed the only mode of deadening pain—the stare of the lamps, and intermittent roar of trains, and then the being whirled through snowy waste and silent night, with the feeling strong upon him that he had died since morning, and that his disembodied spirit was hovering over old haunts ere its flight to the world of doom.

When frosty dawn broke, grey, deathly, and chill, he was standing before his own house, Little Fretterly, gazing upwards from behind a group of elms at the window of the room which was to have been Ginevra's.

Why he had sought his home he knew not, unless it were from the instinct of the wounded deer, whose death agony is best endured in solitude.

He watched the gradual signs of activity in the household: the smoke rising in thin curls from the old stone chimneys, the unbarring of doors and windows, the sleepy face of the housemaid as she shook out some mat or rug, while she paused in her work, little dreaming of her master's proximity, to exchange an hilarious greeting with one of the outdoor servants.

This incident roused Brian to the undesirability of detection in his present disordered condition. Seizing a favourable opportunity, he walked round to a side door which he knew must be now unbarred, and gaining the hall, stole upstairs to his own room. There a fit of shivering seized him. The fire was laid; he lighted it, and crouching upon the hearth, cowered over the blaze. Gradually the blood began to course through his frozen veins. Physical want clamoured. He

was faint, hungry, and exhausted. Mechanically he changed his sodden garments, called for food and drink, and ate and was refreshed.

Life with its bitter pain and heavy burden lay before him —a desert to be trodden, a penance to be fulfilled. The face of God seemed turned away. From the heart of man he could claim no sympathy. Where were all his pure hopes, his bright dreams and happy visions of the future? Gone, blighted, dead in a single night, like the first-born stricken in old time in Egypt.

The night had passed and day had come—day, ghastly in its terrors, unnatural in its contrast of glittering outward brightness and hidden desolation, in which the most terrible duty had yet to be performed.

The tender ewe lamb which he had cherished in his bosom, heart of his heart, more precious to him than his own flesh, must that day be slain by his hand.

It was early afternoon when he reached Champneys. He had given no notice of arrival, hoping to enter the house unobserved, and then wait for an opportunity of seeing Ginevra alone.

Crossing from the station, he reached the park, and chose a rarely used footpath which, winding through the plantation, mounted a gentle rise, and there, fringed by a narrow border of shrubbery, gave opportunity for a clear view of the house and grounds—a position in which the spectator might remain, himself unseen. But long before he reached this point the sound of shouts, laughter, and of carriage-wheels rolling up the avenue warned Gilmore that the skating party was in full activity.

He halted at a break in the shrubbery, where a plane tree hung its miniature stalactites over a rustic bench commanding the grounds below. Here had been formed an artificial rockery, which closed in the upper end of an ornamental sheet of water, now the scene of gaiety, so that Gilmore was in reality but a few feet above the skaters, and could almost distinguish the words of jest and appeal which pierced the frosty air.

Beyond the lake ran the avenue approaching the principal entrance of Champneys, its crystallized trees showing white and feathery against the sky. The ground was covered by

a pure white sheet, broken only here and there where paths had been cleared for the convenience of pedestrians. The wintry sun gleamed red above the crest of the hill, and turned to rose, long streaks of cloud which had gathered in the west, while the grey stone house, half overgrown with ivy, its projections rimed with hoar-frost, reared itself majestically to the right.

A crowd of moving figures swarmed on the ice, some gliding solitary, swan-like in all the dignity of perfect security, others, more ambitious, executing complicated figures, or solemnly performing difficult evolutions; others, chasing each other in a noisy game round the tiny coral-like islets which studded the lake. Hand in hand ladies with their cavaliers skimmed the surface fearlessly and smoothly in motion which suggested a poetic vision. Here and there bright skirts and rich-hued feathers presented vivid spots of colour against the pure white background. Crimson-stockinged children tumbled headlong in their gambols, and picked themselves up again amid the plaudits of the spectators. At the edge of the water was a scarlet-lined summer-house, a cosy retreat, where, round a glowing brazier, the inactive ones reclined in basket chairs, sipping tea, and toasting their daintily shod feet and pretty faces. Now there was a tinkling of bells, and a sleigh dashed up and discharged its fur-covered occupants. It was a scene in which care might have no place, where youth and merriment reigned triumphant.

Like an outcast, debarred from participation in the joys of his fellow-men by a ban more stringent than the curse of Cain, Gilmore scanned the smiling groups below him. In the fascination of despair his eyes jealously followed each movement of Ginevra's. He watched her essay a timid flight, and pause blushing and laughing at her own awkwardness; observed her sweet ministration to Sir Michael's wants; listened eagerly in the vain hope of catching one word uttered by those dear lips when she conversed apart with Rosamond Churchill, or replied to the remarks of the gentlemen eager to pay her attention; noted, ah, how lovingly! the grace of her carriage, the harmony of her attire, the clearness of her eyes bright with exercise and happiness, the sheen of golden hair upon which the little fur cap rested so becomingly. Now she paused almost below him; had he spoken she must have heard his voice. He saw her face soften to dreaminess,

almost sadness, as her gaze was directed to the smoke of a passing train. He knew that she was thinking of him, wondering mournfully perhaps what detained him from her so long.

"Oh, my love! my love!" he murmured. His frame writhed in a convulsion of agony. He buried his head in his hands, and groaned inwardly, praying God for mercy—not upon himself, but upon her.

Thus he remained. He could look no more. Voices and sounds echoed mockingly in his ears. One by one the carriages drove away; the sleigh bells tinkled again. Merriment subsided. The sun set, and the cold became more and more piercing. Now there was silence, and he knew that all had gone within.

Lights shone in the windows of the house, seeming, as it were, to beckon him to warmth and shelter. He thought of the heaven from which he was outcast, and which for Ginevra would, alas! be too soon changed into the blackness of desolation. He walked on, then turned and deliberately retraced his steps towards the village. Not yet would he go to her. A short reprieve was still in his power. He remembered the ball to take place that evening, and recalled Ginevra's girlish delight at the prospect. Let her taste the sweetness of pleasurable anticipation for yet a little longer.

Movement had become a necessity. He wandered through the village, along the high-road, and past another hamlet, then, making a *détour*, back again to the inn at Champneys, where, accounting for his presence by such reason as came uppermost in his mind, he ordered dinner and engaged a room for the night. He waited till it was almost ten o'clock, and the carriages were beginning to roll up the avenue towards Champneys; then wrote to Ginevra to the effect that he had been detained much longer than he had expected, and could not be at the ball sufficiently early to fulfil his first engagements, but would try to arrive in time to claim the last waltz before supper, which she had playfully promised to reserve for him.

He took pains that his hand should be firm and clear, betraying no sign of agitation, and that there should be nothing in the wording of the note calculated to alarm or disquiet her.

Then, with a certain mournful pleasure, resembling that

with which we strew immortelles upon our dead, he unfolded from its wrapper, looked at, and at last despatched with his letter the bracelet which he had purchased for Ginevra in London.

So he waited, and the lagging hour-hand moved on. The dreary roll of the carriages, which had gradually become rapid and continuous and then fainter, had now ceased. The guests were all assembled. He could picture Ginevra smiling, radiant, and yet with expectant eyes turned ever and anon towards the door. . . . And the cruel knife was still uplifted. . . , He burned with dread and impatience. Oh, that the horrible ordeal were passed! And yet each moment was a respite—a little longer staying of the executioner's hand.

It was past one o'clock when he entered the ball-room at Champneys. The hall had been arranged for dancing. Lights shone like jewels against the sombre wall, and glittered in the flower-twined chandeliers. Wreaths garlanded the grim portraits of dead Champneys, and the high oak mantelpiece supported tier upon tier of rare exotics. Cunningly arranged hangings of crimson blent with gold gave richness to the background. Feathery fronds of pampas grass waved above the velvet-draped archway which divided hall and vestibule. The polished floor met the light from above with a myriad gleams, and reflected sheen of satin and lustre of diamonds. From the staircase gallery floated those pathetic cadences, blending gaiety and melancholy—chords of plaintive beauty broken by reproachful discords—peculiar to an order of German waltz music. There are certain phases of thought and feeling from which all outward surroundings seem to borrow the trappings of phantasy. So to-night. The by-standers appeared to converse after the manner of stock figures in pantomimic revelry. The squires and dames, the young men and maids, the dowagers ranged on their benches, the dancers gliding noiselessly down the shining boards, were all to Brian as the phantasmagoria of a dream. The whole situation was dream-like and totally unreal. There flitted through his mind a vision (evoked perhaps by some Faust-like turn of melody) of the Walpurgis saturnalia, with horror underlying its ghastly merriment, and through all, the torturing memory of martyred Marguerite.

His eyes sought Ginevra. No difficult matter to distinguish the slender figure robed in white, which moved nymph-like in

the thronged circle; the flower-crowned head, the sweet face, at once so mournful and so joyous, the eyes tender and still unsatisfied, seeming to tell that life had not yet yielded to their possessor the fulness of her treasures.

He waited till the dance was ended and the next had begun. She was standing, in the embrasure of a window, as yet unclaimed by any partner. He approached her, and calling all the strength of his will to aid in self-mastery, said softly—

"Ginevra."

She started at his voice, and turned, every feature irradiated.

"Oh, Brian, is it you at last? I thought that you would never come. One dance after another unclaimed. And now the evening is more than half over."

"Has it been a pleasant one? Have you been happy, Ginevra?"

"*Happy?*" she repeated, with playful reproach. Groaning inwardly he interpreted her accent. Could there be for her any happiness in which he had no share? "But," she continued, with an air of sweet concern, "I must not scold you. I am sure that your absence has been from no fault of yours, and that your heart has been with me all the time. Oh! you look so tired! Are you ill? Is anything the matter?"

"No. . . . Yes. . . . I was detained in London—and I am weary; and sorry—sorry to have disappointed you."

"You speak so—so mournfully," she said, fixing upon him wide-open and vaguely alarmed eyes. "You *are* ill. What is it? Something has happened."

He winced under her gaze, and turned away his face while he answered with forced calmness.

"Perhaps I had better confess to you at once that my head is aching badly, and that I feel unlike myself. I did not sleep last night. I am very tired."

"My poor Brian. Were you in London?"

"No, not all night; I went down to Fretterly."

"Ah!" and her face brightened, "I know what took you there, and I am really vexed with your father. Sir Michael heard yesterday of the fire at Dingle Farm, and talked of telegraphing to you to go and see what mischief was done. I was indignant at the notion, for there seemed nothing serious in question, and I thought it hard that you should be taken from me—now. I suppose, however, that he did telegraph

after all, and that you went. How good and unselfish you are, Brian! Well, tell me what had happened."

He suffered her to accept the explanation.

"You shall hear everything by-and-by, Ginevra. . . . And now—I should like to dance this waltz with you—the last," he murmured almost below his breath.

But she had caught the words.

"Not the last, Brian; there are several more kept for you. But this is specially reserved. Are you not too tired? If your head is aching the noise and glare must be wearisome. Let us sit down in the conservatory."

Her sweetness maddened him.

"No, no," he exclaimed almost wildly, "I wish you to dance with me."

"Then I will, joyfully. But first of all I must thank you" —pointing to the bouquet which she had laid upon a chair. "There's a thought in every flower, Brian. They might all have been gathered in Australia. The white lilies remind me of Birrali. . . . And this too"—as she touched the bracelet upon her wrist, and smiled and blushed. "Do not give me any more presents—till we are married, dearest," she whispered. "Let me look upon this one as the last memento of my short, happy girlhood."

His heart throbbed, his eyes began to swim. "Come," was all that he could answer, and he placed his arm around her, and led her forth, unconscious as the daughter of Jephthah, who came out merrily "with timbrels and with dances" to meet her doom.

CHAPTER VII.

FAREWELL.

"Stabbed through the heart's affections to the heart!
Seethed like the kid in its own mother's milk!
Killed with a word worse than a life of blows."

An opening movement in dreamy mazurka time had changed abruptly into a wild, maddening waltz.

The violins moaned and the cornets shrieked in harmonious

dissonance as Gilmore piloted Ginevra, straining her close in an embrace of fierce exultation and defiance, like that in which a mortal might strive to hold some daughter of air, whose form was melting from his grasp. Frenzied longings surged in his breast, and from his heart rose the impotent prayer that they might thus die together, and their spirits, bound in fleshless union, float away into infinite space.

There was a crash of instruments, and then from the violins a long-drawn, plaintive sigh. The music ceased. Voices echoed in a strange, confused manner through Brian's ears, as guests trooped in from the supper-room, and others who had been dancing passed out into the vestibule and adjoining apartments. Brian heard his own name uttered by Mr. Medlicott in tones of raillery and reproach. He felt a devouring impulse to escape the storm of questions which he knew would assail him. There had been a brief interlude in the drama, now the actors had stepped forward again, and the scene must be played out in all its harrowing length.

"Let us go," he said to Ginevra, speaking in that unnatural voice which sounded to himself like the voice of one at a distance. "Is there any place where we can be alone for a little while?—I have something to tell you."

"In my sitting-room we shall be free from interruption," she replied. "I would not have it turned into a 'flirtation corner,' as Mr. Medlicott suggested."

Her light words told him how far from her mind was any thought of impending evil. There was laughter upon her lips, and her face, as she raised it to his, beamed with joy. Since his arrival her being had become pervaded by a blessed sense of contentment, and with his presence had vanished that undefined melancholy which during these latter days had shadowed her brightness. Then, as glancing upward she beheld the unutterable sadness stamped upon his features, her playful mood died and her mirth became frozen. She clung to his arm, her eyes seeking his in painful entreaty. But he resolutely held his own averted. In this avoidance of her gaze lay his only power of self-command. Neither spoke till they had traversed the length of the conservatory, and passing through the portal wreathed with passion flowers, were in Ginevra's room, the jarring world shut out.

Now she took both his hands in hers, and laid them against her cheeks, and hung upon him, twining her arms about

his neck, while she whispered in tones of the deepest tenderness—

"Brian, what has happened? What is it? Oh, darling, are you ill? are you unhappy? Oh, darling, tell me!"

His face was livid with agony. She, seeing his suffering, became white as death, and her strength failed. She grew faint and giddy. Now she knew full well that some fearful thing was about to befall her. There was momentary comfort in the pressure of his arm supporting her frame. Could evil approach while he was nigh to guard her? But this—this trouble was something terrible, undreamed of. Again and again she murmured, "Darling, tell me."

He did not answer her entreaty, but while her arms moved imploringly to his neck, and her face, not daring to lift itself, drooped upon his breast, he held her to him as though they might never more be parted.

"Ginevra, oh my beloved!"

Oh, what refinement of torture was this! He had touched, as it were, the treasure most coveted; and it was snatched from him in the very moment of possession. There had been opened before him a heaven of love and purity; and while straining towards it, panting in longing and worship, he had been thrust back into nethermost hell. An angel had nestled in his bosom, healing the plague-spots of sin, soothing with divinest tenderness, whispering of joy and redemption; and it was his bitter fate to be forced rudely to expel the celestial visitant, and deliver her over to be tormented by devils.

Surely chastisement such as this, was inflicted not by merciful Jehovah, but rather by malignant Satan, unto whom power had been given to torment the innocent as well as the guilty.

Like the voice of one wiser than man, rose in his memory words which he had once read or heard spoken.

Retribution for sin comes not through the will of an arbitrary ruler of destinies; but is in accordance with immutable and uncontrollable moral law, inherent in the universe as the physical forces which generate electricity, deadly and indiscriminate in its effects as the bolt which may strike alike the murderer and the child.

His fierce excitement subsided, and instead there crept over him a feeling of mental rigidity. The time had come. The blow must be struck. The burden should be thrown

on Fate. He tried to release himself from her embrace, that so he might stand back and look into her eyes. But her arms were chains. . . . One taste . . . one, only one last quaff of bliss. He bent his head low to hers. Their lips clung together, and he drank of all her love and sweetness in a kiss of despair. Closer, closer he clasped her, as if thus oblivion might be gained, and horror and remorse drowned in one brief moment of ecstasy; and each breath seemed to be a second snatched from an eternity of pain.

She now, shrinking, her wild self-abandonment passed, half disengaged herself, and bending backward, her face uplifted, all her terrors stirred to new intensity, gazed at him with the piteous pleading of a child, which yet dares not ask the form in which the punnishment it dreads is to be inflicted.

Tenderly, as though she were indeed a nursling whose quivering flesh lay bare before the sacrificial knife, Brian drew down her nerveless arms from about his neck, and placed her in a chair. Then he kneeled before her, not now encircling her in his embrace, but only holding her hands pressed tightly against his breast.

"Ginevra—are you brave? Can you bear to know—can you bear a shock which will seem to you more bitter than death?"

The lips trembled; the eyes opened wide. Their appeal was pitiful—more pitiful still the broken accents.

"I—I—will try—— *You* would not hurt me, Brian."

"Ginevra, I have come—— Yesterday I knew—but I could not come. And to-day—I watched you when you did not know it—I waited—till now—because I was a coward . . . because I could not endure to see you suffer this agony. . . . Ginevra, do you guess now? Look at me. This is what I have come to-night to tell you. It is that we must part."

She shook her head, not seeming to comprehend his meaning.

"Part!" she repeated. "You are going away. But it will not be for long."

"Ginevra, do you not understand? If I were going away—even for years, and knew that we might meet again, could I suffer thus? Oh, my love. . . . This is bitter—this is cruel. . . . Our parting must be for ever—hear me—till death. We can never be married."

She uttered a low moan. Her face drooped and changed, and became very still, and she was silent. At last the eyelids moved; the lips parted, quivering

"What have I done," she said, "that you should love me no more?"

"Love you no more!" he repeated. "Oh my God, do I not love you?"

A faint ray passed over her face, as though she had found hope. In pathetic trust she bent her lips to his hand.

"You love me," she murmured. "Darling, then I am not afraid. You will not leave me now."

His silence frightened her anew. She grew white again, and clung to his hand convulsively

"You will not leave me. Tell me nothing—only this, that you love me—that you do not mean what you said."

"Ginevra—I do mean it."

"No—no——" Have you not said that you love me? . . . Do you not remember?—we *cannot* part. . . . It is impossible. . . . Brian, kiss me."

He made no responsive movement. She bent forward, laying her head upon his breast, even in this extremity of anguish smiling up at him—could he remain iron now?—her eyes, in all their pure tenderness, never quitting his face.

"Kiss me," she whispered again.

"Ginevra—I cannot. I cannot, because I must leave you—because it is my duty—because it would be wicked to remain with you."

"Wicked!" and she raised her head, and her hands fell helplessly.

"I must speak harshly—cruelly—because it is my duty—to make you understand. . . . I love you—oh, never, never, when we were happy, as now that I must lose you. It is not what I will or can, but what *must* be."

She leaned heavily back in her chair. The springs of emotion seemed to have broken within her. Her lips framed words. By their motion, rather than by the voiceless articulation, could be distinguish what she said.

"Tell me—everything."

He held her hands, and spoke, forcing himself to distinct utterance, halting every now and then when his voice broke.

"I cannot tell you what it is that obliges us to part. . . . Once—long ago, I tried to make you know that I had not been—that I was not good or true, or worthy of your love. I thought—I hoped that I might become—not worthy; that would be impossible—but I hoped that through your purity

my stains might be cleansed. I was wrong. It is in the past that we forge fetters for the future; some sins may only be expiated by martyrdom. Ginevra, do you understand me?"

She shook her head.

"You must force yourself to understand that I have been wicked, and that my wickedness has made a gulf between us which is impassable. . . . *You* are the sacrifice for my sin; through your martyrdom has come my only hope of purification. I had no right even to dream of such happiness as you would have brought me. I had no right to speak to you of love——"

A chord in her dulled intelligence had been struck. Her thoughts seemed groping for some clue. She bent a little forward, and her brows worked painfully as she faltered—

"But you said—you said, that I might make you better. And I wished for nothing but that you might be happy. We were happy. . . . We loved each other. . . . Why is everything changed since—since three days ago?"

The horror of his interview with Clémence, and of the struggle which had rent his soul—all the misery of that night of doom smote Brian with new force, and drew from him a groan of bitterness.

"Everything is changed," he answered, mechanically and hardly. The very recollections which her question had called forth seemed to have made him rigid as stone. "Why, I cannot tell you. Believe my assurance that I have no alternative but to leave you—that to resume our former position is as impossible as though we were priest and nun. Try to realize that our lot is unalterable, and must be endured as we bear burdens which are a part of our existence. We may never meet again. I am going away—whither I know not; it is little matter, so that an ocean divides us from each other. I would that I could spare you the pain of ever hearing my name spoken. You are very young, Ginevra, and life may not always be to you a dreary penance for another's crime. This shall be my prayer. I don't ask you to forgive me for the blight I have brought upon you. I know too well what generous love you have given me. I don't ask you even to think of me. I should be less wretched if I could feel that the day would ever come in which I should be forgotten by you, or, at least, remembered without suffering. . . . Ginevra, good-bye."

He released her hands, folding them gently upon her knee, and rose to his feet. Standing a few paces distant, he bent upon her a long look of dumb agony, yearning, despair. A sob rose and convulsed his frame. She, having grasped only the fact, that of his own will he was leaving her, and interpreting his anguish as a sign of relenting, started forward, and stretching forth her arms imploringly, cried in passionate tones—

"You are going—going—and not one more word. . . . Oh, what shall I do? How can I bear it? How can I live?"

He made one hurried step towards her, then checked himself and turned away, covering his face with his hands.

"Oh my God!" he murmured; "if I could die to spare her! . . . You will live," he said. "You will be brave. You will not always suffer. God is not merciless. He must have pity upon the innocent. He will send you comfort. . . . Ginevra, oh my life! oh my heart's love! farewell."

And now it was over, and ere many moments she knew that she was desolate. He turned to leave her—to leave her for ever. He was going, and she might not hold him back—might not adjure him by his love to remain. For he loved her. To doubt that would be to doubt her being. Oh, what remorseless fate had seized them! By what strange terrible mystery were they enveloped? Parted! It could not be true. He could not wish to kill her.

She called his name, "Brian! Brian!" and then, passion prevailing, cried in tones of piercing tenderness, "Darling, stay with me!" and he wavered and cast back upon her a look of love so ineffable that for one instant she fancied that her own love had triumphed.

For an instant only. As the door opened and closed there was an inrushing sound of music, that floated through the conservatory. He was gone.

Her faculties deserted her. She sank crushed, almost senseless, to the ground.

Thus she lay in a stupor of semi-unconsciousness for how long she knew not. Another faint burst of music aroused her. She fancied that the door leading outward had again been opened. All her nerves were alert, strung to hearing. She sprang towards it, and stood a wan ghost with straining eyes upon the threshold.

"Brian," she whispered loudly; but no one answered.

Her gaze swept the conservatory, but met only that of Rosamond Churchill, who sat unattended amidst the flowers.

"You are ill," said the latter, quite calmly. "Something has happened. I don't wish to appear intrusive, but had you not better let me take you to your room and call your maid?"

"No, no," cried Ginevra, shrinking back; "I want to be alone."

"Then I will leave you. It is late; people are beginning to go. If you wish, I will make your excuses, and you shall not be disturbed."

Ginevra bowed her head. Alive now to the necessity for self-control, she dragged herself through an inner door, and up a flight of stairs leading to the corridor upon which her bedroom opened.

Once within, she locked the door; no unsympathetic eyes might witness her agony. She tore off her ornaments, and pulled the wreath from her hair. A fire was blazing brightly; the candles were lighted. In a pier-glass she saw the reflection of her ghastly face and disordered figure. Oh mockery! was it only a few short hours since she had stood decking herself gaily, and smiling at the thought of Brian's admiration?

What had happened? Was he dead? Was she dead? Nay, had they not said that not even death could part them? Was life more cruel than death?

An exceeding bitter cry escaped her. All as she was, in her glittering white dress, she flung herself upon the floor, and, face downwards buried in her arms, she moaned—

"Oh, I did love him! Oh, I do love him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSAMOND THE INSTRUMENT OF FATE.

THROUGH the chinks of her shutters the cold wintry sun streamed in upon Ginevra as she still lay prone. Some one was knocking at the door, loudly and imperatively. It was Rosamond Churchill, who, with her lips to the keyhole, clamoured for admittance.

"It is I—Rosamond. Pray let me come in. I have something to say to you; something about Brian."

The words were repeated several times before they made any distinct impression upon Ginevra's dulled understanding. All her faculties seemed drugged. She was conscious only of overwhelming desolation, yet knew not how or whence it had come. Time was a blank. Under the stress of her misery she must either have fainted or slept, for it might have been minutes or years since the terrible scene of last night.

She raised herself. The one word *Brian* acted upon her intelligence as a talisman, and commanded her obedience. Bruised, faint, and dizzy, she staggered across the room, and opening the door, stood passive, the image of dumb despair, before Rosamond.

The latter uttered an ejaculation of horror as the light from the windows of the corridor streamed upon Ginevra's ghastly face, upon her bare shoulders, and the ball-dress which she still wore.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "it is even worse than I feared. You dragged yourself away so bravely last night that I thought it kindest to leave you alone. I should have come to you if I had guessed. Have you been like this all these hours?"

Ginevra only stared blankly. Rosamond herself looked pale and withered, and was clad in a loose dressing-robe, as though she had not long risen. Nevertheless, the morning was advanced, and the sun high in the frosty heavens. The upper part of the house was quiet, and weary guests had not yet left their chambers, but from below came sounds of bustle and movement which indicated that the rooms upon the ground-floor were being restored after the confusion of last night to their normal condition of order.

Rosamond entered and closed the door. Supporting Ginevra with her arm, she led her to a couch, placed a cushion for her head, chafed her hands, which were very cold, and threw a shawl over the shivering figure.

To these ministrations, not ungently tendered, the young girl submitted without show of gratitude or remonstrance. Once she tried to speak, but no voice issued from the quivering lips; and when Rosamond, alarmed, asked if Mrs. Medlicott should be called, could only shake her head in an effort at

imperious negative. Her refusal chimed with Rosamond's own wishes. She drew aside the curtains, thus admitting some light into the dim room, and relit the fire, which had burned down to ashes; then, bidding Ginevra to remain still, and assuring her that no one should come to trouble her, Rosamond left the room.

After a little while she returned, bearing a tray, upon which tea and toast were placed, and with greater show of womanliness than she had ever yet displayed, she poured out a cup, and breaking into it small pieces of the toast, with some approach to tenderness, forced Ginevra to eat and drink.

The food and warm liquid revived the poor girl's failing strength. She heaved a sort of shuddering sob, and looked piteously at Rosamond, as though beseeching her not to touch too roughly the wounds which lay bare and gaping. But Rosamond possessed none of the refinement of inborn delicacy, and in her bosom a faint conflict was waging. She felt in a vague manner that her hour of triumph had arrived, and that the ruin of her own girlish impulses and youthful affections, which she had placed to Brian's charge, was being avenged by Ginevra's suffering. She had hated the young girl in her prosperity and happiness; she hated her now in her misery; and yet she felt at the same time an inconsistent pity, a desire to offer such sympathy as was in her power, and an almost fiendish longing, of which she was aware, and against which she struggled, to deepen Ginevra's wretchedness and humiliation by cynically tracing back causes and making known events, of which she knew that the latter was, in her innocence and ignorance of the world, all unconscious.

Rosamond sat perfectly still, holding Ginevra's hand, her gaze, which, in spite of its concentration, seemed to indicate wandering and warring thoughts, fixed intently upon the poor victim's face. Ginevra had closed her eyes. Sensation was returning. And now she knew that she felt very ill, and scarce knew anything besides. In her struggle against the deathly sickness which was creeping over her, she pressed Rosamond's hand more tightly. There was relief in the feeling of human presence near her; in a manner it assured her of her own identity. But she could not speak, and even active thought was paralyzed.

At last Rosamond said abruptly, "You have quarrelled with Brian."

Ginevra shook her head.

"Then he has gone away from you. If not, why are you so unhappy? There has been some terrible explanation. I watched you as you passed through the conservatory together. I saw his face when he came out of your room."

Ginevra withdrew her hands, and made a motion of entreaty, as though she would have invoked Rosamond's mercy. Rosamond rose from her seat and moved to the fireplace, where she stood with one arm resting upon the mantelshelf, her eyes downcast.

"You are as miserable as it is possible for woman to be," she said bluntly. "There is no use in trying to hide it. I am sorry for you. Your pride may be hurt, and you may not believe me, for I have always been cold and strange, I suppose, in my manner to you, but it is true that I feel for you. You say nothing, you do not cry, and I hardly know whether to go or to stay; but at least it cannot be right to let you remain here alone. Can I do nothing to help you?"

Again Ginevra shook her head.

"When one is in great trouble, it is sometimes a relief to speak, even if it be to some one with whom one has but little in common. I know that you have never found me particularly sympathetic; if you knew all, that fact might not surprise you. My disappointments have made me hard and bitter and wicked, but I have a sort of rough loyalty, and if you choose to trust me I will never betray your confidence."

Ginevra tried to smile in piteous semblance of gratitude, but the smile became a moan. "I cannot—I cannot talk to you."

"You are very much to be pitied," continued Rosamond, in her didactic tone, in which there were yet now and then breaks of real feeling; "more so than we properly trained people, who have other idols which we can worship when we see that the first has crumbled into clay. You had made a god of Brian. To tear him from your heart is to feel it wrenched in two. Ah, I know that sort of pain! I too trusted like the veriest simpleton, and have bitten the dust of humiliation. You are not the only woman whom a man has made to suffer. There may be consolation for you in the thought that your trouble is more easily borne now than if it had happened later. I know Brian. I know what his life has been. I thought that this would come—but it has

come sooner than I expected; it has come very soon." She paused.

Her strange abruptness, the tearing away as it were of that conventional veil which had hitherto draped her real character, did not startle either herself or Ginevra. Some powerful influence seemed pressing upon Rosamond, forcing her to utter words in harmony with the moods which had been working in her mind for days, months past. And upon Ginevra too weighed the same sense of altered conditions. Her white lips moved, but she had no answer ready. Rosamond went on in her hard repressed manner, the sentences falling like a lesson which had been rehearsed, and but for an occasional soft inflexion or accent of scorn or vehemence, resembling the cut-and-dried utterances of an actress with no soul in her part.

"He has not left you willingly; of this I feel certain. You have still more of his heart than any other woman has ever possessed. He might have tired of you, perhaps; that was not improbable; but hardly so soon as this. You must have learned something about him which has broken your trust. Is not this so? Have you then already awakened out of your dream? Did *you* send him away?"

"No," mechanically answered Ginevra.

"Poor child!" said Rosamond. "They might have let you sleep on a little longer, unless, indeed, they had chosen months ago that your eyes should be opened to the realities of life. But it would have been difficult to enlighten you. You have been brought up so differently to the average girl of society. Your Arcadian education might have answered well enough if you had remained in Australia, but here, in England, it is best that we women should be given our weapons of defence when we are still in bibs and pinafores. I always thought that you should know everything there was to know; I wanted his mother to tell you, but she said it was your guardian's business, not hers. She did not wish to run any risk of breaking the marriage. You had money, and you were so charming, and then Brian was to be regenerated through his love for you, and Little Fretterly would be such a suitable background for the exhibition of all the domestic virtues! Vice tamed by innocence—quite a subject for Lady Gilmore's mythological screen. . . . Am I cruel and sarcastic? It is my nature; forgive me. You remember my coming to

your room that first evening at Fretterly. You did not like me much; and I—I had no very kindly feeling towards you. It made me angry to think that you were to have everything you desired, and pass your life in a fool's paradise, spared the suffering which had been the portion of others. It is always a satisfaction to call Fate unjust. . . . I am not sure that she is so on the whole. But you were so gentle, and you seemed so innocent, so full of faith, that after a little while I got to feel almost sorry for you, just as one is sorry for a petted child turned adrift from its mother. *I* was trustful once, and had beautiful dreams for the future, and believed in goodness and constancy—— Well, that doesn't matter. My innocence did not last, and I knew that yours would not either."

"I don't know what dreadful thing is in your mind," faltered Ginevra, goaded to speech. "You see that I am very unhappy. I am sure that you mean kindly, but you cannot comfort me, and I should like to be alone. If there is anything you want to tell me, will you say it quickly and leave me with my trouble."

"You are very proud and sensitive. I see that you wince at my talk," answered Rosamond. "I *am* hard; yes, I know it. Would I not change myself if I could? But when we were children we used to be told that it was wiser to have an aching tooth out than to hug the sweet agony during long wakeful nights. So with you. To be hard may mean that I am kind. If you have only a glimmering of the truth, it is best that you should know it in its entirety. But I have only guessed your trouble. Before I say more, tell me, are you and Brian parted for ever?"

Ginevra's eyes gazed blankly as at some horror which rose dim upon the horizon of memory. Her face was rigid and white as that of a corpse. "For ever!" she repeated, in the voice with which an automaton might utter its single words. "Yes—we are parted for ever."

Rosamond hesitated for a moment. She could hardly reconcile Brian's departure with the fact of Ginevra's ignorance, yet could form no idea how much the latter suspected or had been told of the communication she was about to make to her. In her heart there was a strange mixture of compunction and unacknowledged satisfaction. Complex feelings were at work. It would have been impossible for her to define her motives. An impulse had prompted her to

frankness. Already she repented it, and yet was forced to proceed in speech blunt almost to cruelty.

"It is best for you that Brian's image should be completely shattered in your mind, and that you should not waste your youth in longings and regrets for a happiness which would sooner or later have turned to ashes. I confess that I cannot understand your nature; it has often puzzled me. You live as it were in two worlds, and belong to neither. You seem to have learned strange things, to have read curious books,—my governess would have turned up her eyes in horror at the names of some you have mentioned to me,—but apparently they haven't affected you. That is what is so surprising. Things which most girls would at least have wanted to ask questions about, seem to have dropped from your intelligence like water. I dare say that you have never given a thought to the complications which might result from marriage with a man of Brian's age and character. Probably you imagined that he had never known anything but the properest sentiment till he met you. But you should have learned by this time that most men have pasts which they don't speak of to their wives and sisters. All that is taken for granted; matters adjust themselves. . . . As for us, we are taught in the school-room to believe that society is all Philistinism and 'prunes and prism' morality. Knowledge of the world, as they call it, comes to us perhaps in time, perhaps too late to be of any use in helping us to shape our lives. Up to a certain age our eyes are kept bandaged. It is against this that I cry out. It is a shame; in the battle we are placed at an utter disadvantage. If we have mothers, they do their best for us according to their lights. If we have none, then we must fend for ourselves as best we may. . . . First our faith goes, next our innocence, then we begin to disbelieve in love and in everything that made girlhood sweet and happy. That is what causes wretched love affairs and miserable marriages. . . . Oh, I think that it is cowardly, cruel, wicked in a man to marry without making his wife understand beforehand the sort of life he has led. Many things count for nothing; but when there are ties—real ties—it is base, shameful. What I mean is, that before you promised to be Brian's wife, you ought to have been told that he had taken away a woman from her husband, and had lived with her for years; that she was his wife before God; that she had

children—his children. I don't know how many. I don't know anything about her except that it is true. His father and mother knew it—Will Cassilis, your guardian, every one. It was said that she had great influence over him. They got him away to Australia without his seeing her. Can't you understand that an infatuation such as that is not killed in months or years? If you do not know the reason why Brian has forsaken you, I will guess it for you. It is that he has met this woman again; that she and her children have claims upon him, and that his conscience has bidden him put you away and return to her."

Rosamond poured forth her torrent of revelation without looking at Ginevra. Something held her eyes upon the carpet. Her passionate words had carried her memory back. She was thinking more of her own misplaced affections and fancied wrongs than of the unhappy girl whose heart she was so mercilessly stabbing. Presently she became aware that Ginevra had risen, and was speaking—speaking in a voice which she had never heard before, and which surely did not belong to the bright young creature of yesterday.

"You are a cruel woman. It is an insult to say such things to me—now, in my misery. Leave me."

She motioned to the door. There was in her gesture so much dignity, such imperious command, that Rosamond, awed, and, in the reaction after her vehemence, alarmed at what she had done, could only silently obey.

Then, once more alone, wretched Ginevra locked her door and flung herself again upon the ground in the self-abandonment of bitterest agony. Rosamond's words seemed to surround her and to sting her like live winged things. . . . "Taken away a woman from her husband. . . . Lived with her for years. . . . She is his wife before God." . . . This then was the sin of his youth to which Brian had alluded, which he could not reveal to her in its hideousness, of which their two lives must be the dire expiation! The truth seemed to scorch her very soul, the blood rushed from her heart. She could have borne better any shame, any horror but this. Her guardian had known it! Will Cassilis had known it! Cheeks and brow burned as she remembered his entreaties and remonstrances uttered under the palm trees at Galle. It was from this pain and humiliation that he had wished to save her, and she in her ignorance had so wholly misconceived

him! . . . Oh, dreary wilderness of life, foul as a charnel-house, with loathsome corpses lying where before had been strewn smiling flowers! How could she bear the light of day? Where could she escape into solitude and darkness?

She lay, her frame racked by sobbing sighs. A voice, that of her maid, sounded without; the door was gently tried. But she remained insensible to all external impressions, barely realizing the fact of her own existence. She was enduring that sort of agony in which nerve force is intensified beyond the capacity for sensation. A blow had assailed the very centre of her being. Active thought was paralyzed.

To whom could she appeal for comfort? Not to Brian—that idol was broken for ever. Not to her father, the dead philosopher sleeping his long sleep beneath the Birrali Crag. Not to that cold abstraction she had called her Deity—lifeless, formless, inexorable as one of Nature's laws.

Science, humanity, immutable order, impersonal immortality! Oh, dense, shadowless void in which no star glimmered! Whither in this supreme crisis of her misery might she turn for aid or comfort?

* * * * * *

Suddenly the rayless mind became lightened. She was in the cathedral at Naples. The organ, sweet as a celestial choir, was pealing solemnly through vaulted aisles. The light from high stained windows shone on kneeling worshippers like radiance from heaven. The saints smiled pityingly from their niches. The Holy Mother with her Babe bent lovingly towards a prostrate form—her own—Ginevra's; and the Christ—a lambent flame about His head, with thorn-crowned brows and pierced limbs, and features transfixed by woe vast and unutterable as the concentrated anguish of a suffering humanity—seemed to draw her upwards by a glance god-like, yet human in its tenderness; while the Divine lips murmured in tones more thrilling than the organ's voice, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden."

And from Ginevra's soul was wrung the first prayer of faith which she had ever uttered: "Oh, God, help me."

There stole over her a feeling of etherealized exaltation. The stillness seemed intense. Out of the silence an unseen but dimly felt messenger of sympathy crept to her side. Her sobs subsided, as might those of a child hushed upon its mother's breast, and human yearnings awoke within her.

The messenger spoke—words which she had heard—was it a few months since, or was it in a previous lifetime? "*When, if ever, you are forsaken, and in misery, come to me, and you shall see what wealth of sympathy I have to give.*"

Ginevra started and cried aloud, "Mother, mother, I will go to you."

She rose and dressed herself, and prepared for her journey, placing such necessaries as she might require in a bag which she intended to carry. There was method in her arrangements. She even consulted a Bradshaw, and ascertained that there would be, in less than half an hour, a convenient train to London. With a view to fortifying her strength, she ate and drank all that remained of the tea and toast which Rosamond had brought her. Before leaving her room she wrote a note to her guardian.

"*My dear Mr. Medlicott,*

"*You will be surprised to hear that I have gone away from Champneys; but I beg you to be as kind as you always have been to me, and not to search for me, or let people talk, so that my trouble may not be made more bitter than it is. My engagement to Brian is at an end. Perhaps you may have heard from him; at any rate it is right you should know at once that we are parted for ever, and that it is useless to make any effort to bring us again together. It is for this reason that I am going away; I could not endure questionings and condolences. Pray, pray, dear Mr. Medlicott, forgive me, and believe that I know how kind you are, but you cannot help me now except by leaving me alone. Indeed, to stay here would be more than I could bear. I am going to London to be with a lady who knew my father, and who loves me. I cannot tell you her name, or more about her, for she would not wish it.*

"*Your grateful and affectionate ward,*

"*Ginevra.*"

She left this note upon her dressing-table, then before many minutes had passed she was walking to the station along the same path that Brian had trod the day before, her hand closed over the address which she had found in Madame Dessolles' purse, and which was her only clue to the whereabouts of her mother.

CHAPTER IX.

DELIRIUM.

Upon the night of Gilmore's visit to Holbrook Terrace, Ellen, Clémence Dessolles' little maid, did, in obedience to his directions, pay several surreptitious visits to the door of her mistress's room.

Each time that she listened she could hear Madame Dessolles pacing restlessly to and fro, as though she were in pain or agitation, but in answer to Ellen's timid inquiries whether anything were the matter, the answer, uttered at length in impatient, almost angry tones, was, "No, she had a headache, and wished for no food, wished only to be left in peace." . . . "No, let Ellen go to bed instantly, and trouble her no more."

Clémence came downstairs upon the following morning, but it was evident that her malady, whether headache or heart-sickness, had not abated. Her face was pale, pinched, and oppressed; her eyes were blank as those of a blind person, and her manner was strangely abrupt and preoccupied, while she attended to the little girl's wants and sent her away to play with a heavy indifference totally at variance with her usual affectionate solicitude. Thus she remained for the whole day, keeping in her darkened drawing-room, seated or lying with hands motionless and abstracted gaze, but refusing to acknowledge any ailment, and sharply bidding Ellen leave her undisturbed.

The little maid's experience of illness and sorrow had been of the loud, groaning, demonstrative sort, and therefore this state of unnatural quietude was calculated to dispel rather than to arouse her alarm. She considered headache as a mysterious indisposition principally confined to the upper classes, usually resultant from ill temper or domestic disturbances, and hardly amenable to medical treatment. She had already revolved in her mind the possibility of any discreditable secret as accounting for the seclusion in which Madame Dessolles lived, and connecting Gilmore's visit—he being of the type which might inspire suspicion and admiration—with her mistress's sudden change of demeanour, jumped to the

conclusion that the latter was certainly referable to some communication of an exciting nature which had passed between them, and which was not likely to produce any disastrous physical consequences. "She'll be all right in a day or two," thought the maid. "I'll let her be, and look after Miss Jenny."

Ellen was blessed with an unimaginative mind and an energetic body, and did not greatly concern herself over sentimental matters. She had never possessed a lover of her own, but she had read certain sensational fiction, and was perhaps right in attributing all generally obscure disorders to affections of the heart which were after all but temporary. She dismissed Colonel Gilmore's warning from her thoughts, and turned over her easily earned sovereign, in the conviction that she was doing all that he expected of her when she carried in beef tea to the drawing-room, and took little Ginevra into her charge, impressing upon the child that she must not worry her mamma, who wished to be quiet. Moreover, there was a carpet for the basement parlour, her own particular domain, to be patched and renovated, and to this useful occupation Ellen applied herself with gusto.

Clémence herself hardly knew whether she passed days or hours in this stupefied condition. Outwardly she was composed; within, every nerve and fibre was strained to numbness. When she caught sight of herself in the glass, it occurred to her that her eyes stared like those of a mad woman. She hoped that she was going mad, for that would bring oblivion. At times flashes of light seemed to blind her; her head felt as though it were bursting; horrors started up round her. She had strange hallucinations. Sometimes she fancied that a million hands were pressing her down into flames; sometimes that a monster of the deep was waiting with open jaws to devour her. Yet she knew that these were hallucinations. Sometimes she was conscious of her present misery, but it was as though her thoughts had escaped from the control of her will, and wandered round that hateful subject, ever investing it with fresh horrors, yet never bringing it clearly before her understanding. She seemed to be living through the agonies of a long nightmare, her body remaining torpid and quiescent. She lay down and rose up. She tried to eat when at the usual hours food was brought to her; and spoke when Ellen addressed her, though she could scarcely hear her

own voice, it sounded so far away. But she had the cunning of a diseased mind: she would not confess that she was ill, for she knew that a doctor would be sent for; and she wished to die. At times she dozed, and knew when she awakened; at others she was quite unconscious, though for how long she could not tell. Occasionally, like a paroxysm of pain, the awfulness of the situation would overwhelm her; and then for a moment her thoughts would flow in rational sequence. But the strain was too terrible to be endured. Then would come blackness and dizziness, and groping after truth; and a speech or phrase uttered by herself or Brian during their fearful interview would recur again and again in every imaginable combination of words, till it became unmeaning gibberish, or was drowned by the rushing and throbbing in her ears and brain.

* * * * * *

Early in the afternoon of the day but one succeeding Gilmore's visit to Clémence, Ellen was called from her labours by the sound of an uncertain ring, and upon going to the street door found herself in the presence of a young and beautiful lady, whose face was very pale and whose eyes had that hunted expression betokening excitement and alarm.

It was Ginevra Rolt, who in faltering accents inquired if this were where Madame Dessolles lived.

"Yes," replied the maid, "this is Madame Dessolles' house, and she is at home; but indeed, miss, I don't think she is in a state to see a stranger. I don't know what has come to her, and if she has any friends or relations, I should be thankful if they would tell me what to do for her."

Seeing Ginevra's shocked face, the maid, as though waiting to be interrogated, paused for an instant, then, no question being asked, continued glibly—

"I have not been many months in service here, and there hasn't been till the other night a soul, so to speak, within the doors. Madame Dessolles lives very quiet. She was sensible and right enough except for a headache till to-day; but when I took her in her dinner she spoke so queerly and looked so wild, that I was frightened out of my wits, and got the grocer to let his boy run off at once for the doctor. I wish that I had sent yesterday; and I was on the look-out for something amiss after what the gentleman said to me. It was he who told me where to go for the doctor. I am certain that it

must have been he who upset my mistress, for she has not been the same since he was here."

Ginevra's heart sank; she was bewildered by this new shock. "What gentleman?" she asked vaguely, more with the feeling that comment was required of her than because the maid's communication respecting Clémence's visitor had made any distinct impression upon her mind.

"I never set eyes upon him before," replied Ellen. "It's the first time, to my knowledge, that he has been since I came to live with Madame Dessolles. A tall gentleman, military-looking, upright, and with an oldish face and brown moustache. It was Monday evening he came, and the name on the card he gave me with the doctor's address written on it was Colonel Gilmore."

Fresh horrors seemed closing round Ginevra, turning her giddy. She stretched out her arms as though to thrust away the dreadful suggestions which pressed upon her, and staggered a step forward. Meanwhile, the cabman had brought in her bag, and laid it in the hall. He touched his hat, and demanded his fare, which Ginevra mechanically paid. Ellen looked doubtfully at the luggage, then at the visitor, and seemed to gain reassurance. Finally she asked—

"Are you a friend of my mistress's, miss? If so, perhaps you may be a comfort to her. She keeps talking about some place with an outlandish name, and calling on 'David' to save her. What does she mean? And then she cries for 'Ginevra.' I took in Miss Jenny, but that only made her worse."

"I am—yes, I am her friend—a near friend," answered Ginevra in agitated tones. "I am very glad that I have come now, so that I may be with her if she is ill. I want to do everything for her. I can comfort her. Take me to her at once."

Ellen, glad to be relieved of her responsibilities, hesitated no longer. She gently opened the drawing-room door, and was about to usher in Ginevra, when a child's cry sounding shrilly from below made her pause, and muttering, "There's Miss Jenny in mischief again, I'll be bound," she darted away, leaving Ginevra to enter her mother's presence alone.

The shutters were half closed, and the room was all dim and still. There was a decaying fire in the grate, and in an

armchair close beside it sat a motionless figure with livid profile sharply defined against the crimson cushions upon which it rested. All the rest was black drapery, upon which the hands lay like white uncanny things. Ginevra saw that the fingers twitched convulsively, and that the eyes were prominent and fixed in a glassy stare. She had entered quietly, closing the door behind her, and now she stood, unable to advance or recede, struggling with all her might against the nameless dread which had well-nigh overcome her. During the weary journey from Champneys she had escaped somewhat from the horror of her desolation in picturing herself rushing into Clémence's outstretched arms, and, with head laid upon the bosom to which all her life she had been a stranger, sobbing forth the tale of her misery, and receiving such unction of womanly sympathy as could only be given by a mother.

And now that the supreme moment had come, and she stood but a few paces from the mother who had borne her, she was gripped by terror and reluctance stronger than her love and yearning; and she could not speak nor move.

While she remained thus there was the sound of a loud ring and knock, of voices and commotion without, and of quick steps in the passage, while Ellen's tones, raised in exclamations of surprise and censure, adjured "Master Oscar" not to go into the drawing-room, for his mother was ill, and the doctor was expected. But Oscar was not minded to obey orders issuing from an authority so contemptible. He pushed the door wide open, and ran in, crying—

"Mamma, what's the matter? Did you not get old Bowles' letter? Johnny Crump has caught the scarlet fever, and all the boys that have got anywhere to go are sent away. Bowles said that he had written to tell you I was to come home to-day."

But no answer came from Madame Dessolles, and for a moment the boy stood still, struck with consternation. Then he pulled back the shutter, and light from the street flooded the room, and revealed him and Ginevra to each other. Oscar, cap in hand, his brown eyes aglow, his handsome face lifted eagerly, its regularly marked features suggesting so unmistakably the lines of another countenance, and Ginevra, gazing at the boy as though he had been a spirit, pale, transfixed under the spell of awful prevision.

Oscar moved a few steps, then paused opposite her, his look now fixed curiously, now turned away, and then back again in a sort of fascination. Little Ginevra had stolen in behind them, and was stroking the other Ginevra's furs, murmuring in child language, "Oh, what a pretty lady! Nice pussy!"

This tiny incident, in almost grotesque contrast with the tragic elements by which she was encompassed, utterly unnerved Ginevra Rolt. She shuddered convulsively, and made a movement as of flight. Then arresting herself, and struggling to be free of the phantoms that thronged her, she staggered towards Clémence, who had risen, and was standing, sheathed in black, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed, and brow livid. The young girl caught the elder woman's arms, and gazed with agonized questioning into her face. Then burst forth the bitter cry—

"Mother! mother! have you no words with which to comfort me? I am heartbroken; I am sick with misery. Mother, I have come—I am here, because you said that I might come to you if I were desolate and in despair. . . . Oh, I am lonely! I am forsaken. Be loving to me, for I have no one in the world but you. . . . And *you* are ill; you too are wretched. Mother, let us cling to each other, let us comfort one another. In my prosperity you forbade me to seek you, but now in my sorrow you will take me to your heart, and let me be your own child. Mother, I am sick with horror. Life seems full of mystery—full of wickedness. I have learned terrible things. Tell me what they mean. You have seen Brian. You know why he has gone away from me. Is it all true? Mother, tell me what it means."

While she poured forth her incoherent prayers, Ginevra clung wildly to Clémence's hands, her knees, her dress; but with arms of iron the mother repulsed her child.

"You come to *me?*" she said, in a loud unnatural whisper. "What can *I* do? How can *I* comfort you? You say that you are forsaken. Am not I doubly desolate? Am not I accursed? I am a sinful woman, too vile to be a mother. Did I not say that you were my living reproach, my living woe? Die, die." She smote her own breast with her clenched hands. "There is no place for you on earth."

The two children quailed in terror before this outburst of despair. They screamed unheeded; they pulled their mother's

dress, and tried to clasp her hands, crying shrilly, "Mamma, mamma, speak to us."

"Oscar—Ginevra," said Clémence, her voice changing suddenly to a softer tone, "look at me."

The children obeyed, fixing their frightened eyes upon hers. She took their hands.

"Come with me," she went on, in a broken, hurried way, "out of this horrible house—this horrible room. I had a vision last night which told me how we might be saved—saved through death. Innocent and guilty—guilty and innocent. . . . Listen. You must be good children and follow me—away from here. . . . We will go across the sea, and through the forest—oh, the weary, weary forest and never-ending trees!—to a place called Birrali. . . . And there, beyond the great plain, deep down among the mountains, we shall find a stony path, and on each side the hills rise high, and the gum-trees grow thickly, and the ground is rough, so that our steps cannot be traced, and no one shall see whither we are bent. Below the hills the rocks are piled—one upon another, like tombs—grave-stones for us three. Down in the valley there is a pool, and the wattle grows over it, and a grey rock shelters it. The water is clear and deep. There we will lay ourselves down, and I will press you to my bosom so that you cannot cry. They say that drowning is not much pain, and it will soon be over, and we shall be at peace."

The children's wide eyes were riveted upon their mother's face. Their little limbs trembled, but they were too deeply awed to utter word or cry.

Then, in one of those strange exhibitions of latent consciousness peculiar to certain phases of delirium, the scene embedded in Clémence's memory started out in the vividness of reality. Her form assumed an expectant attitude; her eyes grew soft; she seemed to listen.

"Hark!" she murmured, "my darling is coming . . . she is coming. I hear the sound of her horse's feet as she rides down the hill. . . . She must not see me, and I may not speak. I may not touch her hand, or press her lips with mine. David, release me. It was cold, inhuman to exact from me such a promise. Am I not a mother? Have I forfeited all rights? Then be it so. I have no honour—no faith to *you*. . . . Darling, wait . . . one moment . . . Ginevra. My baby, my little one. . . . Oh, what place in my heart have

Brian's children in comparison with you? . . . Her mother! Ah, God have mercy! Is it not she whom Brian loves? I —I am forsaken. Die, wicked, unnatural woman!"

She uttered a heavy groan, and sank upon a chair, still holding Oscar's hand, while the little girl, released, rushed from the room, crying, "Ellen! Ellen!"

"Oscar," Clémence went on, and her voice had changed again to that awful whisper, "do you see that girl standing there? She says that she is unhappy; she says that she is forsaken. It is not to us that she should come for pity. Tell her that it is we who are cast forth. Say that we will fly to the end of the world, so that her eyes may never again look upon our faces. Say that I will take you, my two children, and that we will lie down and die in the deep pool at Birrali, and the earth shall know us no more."

She made an imperative gesture towards the boy; he moved forward uncertainly, knowing not how to obey her wild commands. But Ginevra had staggered to the sofa, and had fallen back upon it, white and motionless.

CHAPTER X.

THE CRY OF THE INNOCENT.

WHEN, in obedience to Ellen's summons, Will Cassilis came to Holdborough Terrace, he found Madame Dessolles in the state of low delirium which accompanies cerebral inflammation. Holding Oscar by the hand, she had gone forth from Ginevra's presence into the hall, and would have taken him out into the street had she not become alive to the absence of the little girl, which her unhinged mind was yet capable of recognizing as an obstacle to the carrying out of her mad plans. Little Ginevra's cries had called Ellen from below, and the maid finally persuaded her mistress to be led to her own room, and prevented egress therefrom by guarding the door till Dr. Cassilis' arrival.

From neglect of precursory symptoms, the illness had assumed a serious aspect, and Will's first care was to send for an experienced nurse. Clémence's wanderings revealed

to him that the exciting cause of the attack had been an interview with Brian Gilmore. Gradually, as her delirium became more pronounced, the ghastly truth in all its horror dawned upon his understanding, though of Ginevra's knowledge of the position and presence in the house he had as yet no glimmering. It was well for him that his patient's condition forced the concentration of his thoughts. Active measures were imperatively necessary, and with only Ellen's assistance difficult to carry out. At last exhaustion supervened, and Clémence lay calm and almost unconscious. Then came some moments of respite, when, as he sat motionless by his patient's side, the dull sense of horror and of tragic reality gained upon him, almost paralyzing his faculties, so that not all his powers of professional absorption and strength of will sufficed to chain his attention to the prostrate form before him.

Meanwhile, after the first confusion, the house seemed curiously still; Ellen, in anxiety for her mistress, and self-reproach at her own negligence, had no thought to bestow upon the stranger downstairs. She had almost forgotten her existence, or supposed her to have departed. Only the children, sternly forbidden to seek their mother, and awed by the doctor's arrival and by the strange scene they had witnessed, stole back in their loneliness to the drawing-room, and seeing the visitor stretched to all appearance dead upon the couch, watched beside the nerveless form till consciousness slowly returned. Thus, when Ginevra's eyes re-opened, the first object upon which they rested was the face of Oscar.

She shuddered violently and turned her head away. The sight was hateful to her; but in the dimness of waking she had no comprehension of the cause of her repulsion. The room seemed red as if swimming with blood, and loud noises deafened her ears. Then gradually vision and hearing became more distinct, and memory began to return; at first partially, one link being gathered and the rest slipping away; while all the time there pressed upon her the sense of some unutterable horror, round which her thoughts went groping, but which they could not grasp. And for a space all was blank again, and spirit and substance passed for the second time through the process of reunion.

She lay motionless, the dread, as it were, outside her own being, while her mind was still nothingness. She knew by

her physical sensations that she was alive, that was all. When she tried to move her head it felt as of iron. Words which she phrased unmeaningly to herself refused to pass her lips. And then the terror without assumed definite shape, though it did not seem part of her own consciousness, but something far from her, yet cruelly distinct, upon which she was forced to look. The awful scene she had gone through appeared to revolve on giant wheels in space; of this impression she was certain. She wondered whether those wheels would ever cease their rotation, or if she were to be crushed by their relentless motion. Scenes and faces whirled before her mind's eye. By-and-by the speed of the revolution seemed to slacken, and visions—for her late experience still presented itself pictorially—opened out and enlarged, line by line, detail by detail, a lurid light illumining them, till every incident of the last fateful week stood forth inscribed in strokes of flame. She saw herself standing at the window of her boudoir, watching for the first time the falling snow, and interpreting it as an omen of ill. She beheld Brian's face of anguish, now read and understood through this appalling knowledge, as he had bent his last look upon her before quitting her presence for ever. She felt herself crushed, helpless in her glittering array, dumb under the lash of Rosamond's biting words; again she felt the repulse of Clémence's iron arm, again traced the shadow of features she knew in the wondering, wistful little face which, visible now even in the dimness of the room, was pressed close to hers.

With the frenzy of sudden loathing she sat upon the sofa, and pushed the boy from her. He turned upon her, indignant and tearful.

"You are a bad, unkind girl. Go away. I hate you. What did I do to you? I did not want to vex you. I was only sorry to see you lying there sick. You are an ill-tempered thing. If you were a boy I'd fight you. But I can't, because you're a girl; and, besides, you are three times as big as me. Coward!"

"You are right. I *am* a coward," said Ginevra, seating herself again, and staring at the boy with her great eyes, which seemed to see through and beyond him. "I ought not to be cruel to *you*. *You've* done no wrong. I am sorry for having pushed you away. Come here, Oscar."

But Oscar, with the sense of ill-usage strong upon him, stood still, and began to cry unrestrainedly.

"No," he sobbed. "I liked you at first. I don't now. Why won't they let me go upstairs? Ellen says that Dr. Cassilis is there. What is the matter with mamma? Ellen, Ellen! I want to go and see my mother."

"Hush," said Ginevra in a hard whisper. "You must not speak so loudly. Do you hear? You must be a brave boy, and if you are unhappy you must bear your trouble without crying. Do not mind me. Forgive me for having hurt you."

Oscar ceased weeping. Her look and manner exercised a curious influence upon him. With the intuition which children in a high degree possess, he recognized the presence of some mysterious element which had transformed his little world into the scene of a tragedy. He sat down upon a stool before Ginevra, and placing his elbows upon his knees, rested his chin on his hands, and looked at her solemnly and silently. She could not see his face with distinctness, for the short winter afternoon had deepened into dusk, but she felt his eyes glowing upon hers. An intense hatred of the boy overpowered her. She wished with all her might that he would go and leave her. She wished to be alone—to abandon herself without restraint to her misery. She could not collect her thoughts while his gaze, which yet had for her a horrible fascination, was riveted upon her face. She felt a mad desire to thrust him again from her, to rise and fly—to do anything which might banish from her eyes the evidence of that which in her mind seemed too frightful to be contemplated. Strangely, she had none of this feeling of aversion towards the little girl, who now lay asleep, with her head pressed against the foot of the sofa. As her look fell upon the drooping figure, she marvelled in a cold-blooded way at her own inconsistency. . . . And then her brain whirled again, and the great wheels seemed flying round once more. She made a desperate movement towards the boy, which caused him to alter his attitude, and for a second to lower his eyes. That at least was a relief.

"I don't know what to call you," he said. "What is your name?"

"Ginevra." Something constrained her to reply.

"Ginevra!" repeated Oscar. "It is Jenny's real name

too; but only mother calls her by it sometimes. That's strange. . . . Well, Ginevra——"

"Yes."

"I am not unhappy now—not much—at any rate I don't mind what you did. I say, you are not a coward, because you said you were sorry. I am sorry for having spoken rudely to you. Let us be friends. It is getting very dark. Do you think that mamma is better?"

"I don't know."

"Have you got a mother?"

"Yes."

"Have you any little brothers and sisters?"

"I am all alone."

"I suppose that your father is dead too?" said Oscar thoughtfully. "Ginevra, are you cold?"

"Yes, very cold."

"Will you make up the fire if I get some coal and some matches? I know where they are kept."

"Yes," replied Ginevra, in the same dull, apathetic tone. "Go and get them."

The boy went out. After a few minutes he returned carrying what he had sought, and struck a light which shed a feeble illumination over the room. Ginevra moved to the blank hearth, where there was now but a heap of ashes. She mechanically laid the fuel and set it on fire; then she realized how numbed she was. Oscar knelt before the fender and stretched out his hands to the warmth.

The sleeping child, roused by the glow, stirred and uttered a faint sigh.

"Jenny will be shivering when she awakes," remarked Oscar, with his old-fashioned air of wisdom. "Couldn't we bring her near the fire?"

Ginevra lifted the little girl gently in her arms, and placing the heavy head upon her shoulder, seated herself in an armchair beside the hearth. Contact with the soft round cheek, the touch of the loosened hair and nerveless little fingers, appealed to the latent instinct of motherliness in her nature. As she clasped the tender frame to her breast her heart went out in keen yearning to the child, who might one day be a woman, injured, helpless, and forsaken like herself. The fierce pain by which she had been gnawed was for a moment stayed. Her own craving for mother-love which

had been so rudely thrust back into her bosom seemed to find satisfaction in the impulse which prompted her to lay her lips on those of little Jenny.

She sat thus, her face lowered, her golden hair which had escaped from her bonnet mingling with the child's darker locks, her forlorn gaze fixed drearily upon the coals, when Oscar, his eyes bright and his cheeks burning, turned, and began again to watch her with intensifying interest and wonder. She knew that his look was upon her, but would not meet it. At last he asked,—

"Are you unhappy?"

"Why do you think so?" answered Ginevra, wincing as might a wounded animal under a second dagger-thrust.

"Because you sit so still, and your eyes are large as if they saw nothing. That is how mamma sits sometimes. And she bids me not to speak to her because she is sad. She says that she has had great troubles. Have you great troubles too? Are you sad, Ginevra?"

"Oh, do not kill me by your talk!" cried the poor girl, with an abruptness of which, in her anguish, she herself was unconscious. "Be quiet. Leave me alone. Don't look at me."

Oscar shrank back frightened, and said no more.

CHAPTER XI.

"I WILL STAY WITH MY MOTHER."

> "Forgive her; she sees clearly for herself;
> Her instinct's holy."

BY-AND-BY, when it was quite dark without, the door opened, and a man bearing a lighted candle entered. It was Will Cassilis, who had come from downstairs in search of writing materials, and was surprised at finding the drawing-room aglow and tenanted.

He stood for a moment surveying the group by the fire—the bent figure of the woman, holding the child in her arms, its waxen cheek crushed against her breast; the boy at her feet, his hand shading his forehead, obedient to her command

of silence; the subtle atmosphere of tragedy which seemed to envelop the three. Ginevra's profile was outlined clear as that of a cameo against the red blaze; it was almost as impassive, and bore the stamp of grief too deep-seated for words or gestures. Will advanced and said softly—

"Ginevra."

She looked up with those piteous eyes, and saw that in his was reflected the same tragic knowledge which had lately crushed her life. Her presence in that house, between these children, impressed the ghastly reality upon him as nothing else could have done. Each was conscious of the other's mind; and yet between them there yawned a chasm of misery so wide, so unfathomable, that they could only gaze dumbly across it, knowing that it could never be bridged by human sympathy. Neither evinced any surprise at the meeting. All natural social conditions were reversed. Will did not even wonder how or why she had come. His whole being was strained in impotent yearning towards the wretched girl who silently appeared to him across this gulf of suffering and sin, which seemed to divide her from the sphere of humanity. Her half-parted lips and quivering eyelids told of the helpless shrinking of a child whose trust in love and truth has been rudely shattered, and who for the first time has been brought to realize the existence of horrible evil. This deepened the infamy of the sacrifice. It was not for her own sin that Ginevra paid the penalty of pain. The horror which hung upon her, which could not be shaken off, which must all her life hold her aloof from spoken compassion, was no consequence of her own guilt.

A wave of intense pity swept Will's heart. He bent down and touched the cold hand which clasped the form of the sleeping child. It was the only way in which he dared express his comprehension and absolute devotion to her need, whatever shape it might take. At that moment he was not torn by any impulses of selfish love. Personal feeling was entirely merged in aching solicitude for her. She seemed to understand the movement, for her eyes drooped as though she had received an answer to her soul's appeal. . . . And then the little girl stirred, opening wide the fringed eyelids, and crying out in bewilderment at finding herself in the arms of a stranger.

Ginevra soothed her, bidding her not be frightened, gently,

but in that dull whispering voice, which revealed her condition to Will more clearly than her looks had done.

He saw that she shrank back shuddering when Oscar leaned against her knee, saying, in the attempt to quiet his sister—

"Hush, Jenny! Don't you see that it is the lady who came to-day? You must not make a noise. Mamma is sick;" and instinctively understanding Ginevra's repulsion, Will grasped the boy's hand and led him out of the room. Then he returned for the little girl, whom he raised from Ginevra's arms and carried weeping away.

He was gone for several minutes. When he came back alone, the room echoed with the sound of deep-drawn sobs. He saw that Ginevra had cast herself back in the chair, and with her head pressed against the cushions, was giving herself up to the wildest emotion. Her whole frame was convulsed. Her agony came forth in moans and tremulous gasps. The strain was greater than her powers could endure.

Though riven by the anguish of watching and hearing, Will suffered her to weep on, knowing that this physical outlet was now her best relief.

After many paroxysms her sobs broke; and at last she remained still and exhausted, only every now and then uttering a faint moan. Like a child, she stretched out her hand to Will, and he clasped it silently.

What that touch was to her, only those who have passed through supreme crises in their inner lives can dimly imagine. It made earth solid, existence reality; it was like a star shining in deepest blackness, a fellow-voice rising from the Valley of Desolation. Ginevra tried to speak, but only a whisper came forth. He was obliged to stoop close in order to catch the words.

"Is she very ill?"

"Yes," he replied gravely; "she is very ill."

"Will she die?"

"That I cannot tell. I think her in very great danger."

"It might be better—it would be better that she should die?"

A faint murmur of pity and tenderness was Will's only answer.

"You know," Ginevra went on still whispering—"you know that she is my mother?"

"I know everything, Ginevra."

He felt that she shuddered. A hoarse sob choked her utterance. It was as though she wished to say something but could not find words.

"Ginevra," said Will, trembling with agitation, "you said —you promised me not very long ago, that if you ever needed help in trouble, you would send for me. You are in trouble now—too deep for aid or sympathy. I can do nothing to comfort you, that I know; but I want you to feel that I am beside you in body and in soul—that I only live to serve you —*my sister.*"

He longed, yet knew not, except in these two words, how to convey to her the utter annulment of any longings he might once have cherished. In order that he might instil into her mind absolute confidence in the unselfishness of his devotion, he would gladly at this moment have undone the sweet bitter past, and would have rooted from his heart the love which was a part of his very life. But a moment later he hated himself for having misconstrued her nature so far as even to admit the possibility of any such consciousness. The might of her sorrow had lifted her far above considerations of that kind. She bent her mournful eyes upon him in a brief glance, which seemed at once to seek and to elude his own. She changed her position, and turning sideways to him with her chin resting upon her palm, said—

"I cannot speak so that you can hear me. Will you sit close to me?—so."

He drew a low chair very near her own, and bent his ear towards her lips, for her voice, broken by sobs that came again like the struggling gasps of a child trying to speak after a burst of weeping, was almost inaudible.

"I have not forgotten—all that you said—only I cannot bear to think of how you wished—how you tried to make me understand. You can help me—a little; only not by talking. You help me by being sorry. What comfort is there for me in the world? I have no one to turn to. I can't think. . . . It's all blackness. . . ." She waited a moment uncertainly, then her throat quivered, and in a piteous burst of passion she went on: "Oh, I did love him! My heart is bleeding for him. He was my life and I his. . . . Lately, because I was so happy, I had begun to think that there might be a God who had given me Brian's love. It's all false, false.

If there were a God in heaven who loved His creatures, wouldn't He have struck one of us dead that night when Brian and I first met?"

She had half risen, and now sank back again. Her features assumed the stony look they had worn when he first entered, and her eyes wandered again vacantly. He could have better borne to hear her sob. He uttered a groan, and she, moved by apprehension lest he should, in cruel effort to console, say something which would only lacerate anew the bleeding wound, made a quick gesture of arrest.

"Don't speak. I cannot bear it. You must understand without words."

Will obeyed and was dumb, his eyes only questioning.

"Keep me from being wicked," she said. "If I could believe that there were a God, and that this were His will, it might seem less hard."

Oh for the utterance of faith! At that moment Will would have given his heart's blood for the assurance of the fervent Christian that God's ways are good.

"Try to believe," he said humbly, "that we have inherited a birthright of sin and suffering, and that we are martyrs for the violation, by others, of changeless laws which were made for our good. It is the children's doom to bleed for the parents' crimes."

"Martyrs?" she repeated, and a softer expression came over her face. "He said that in my suffering lay his hope of expiation. Ah, that is well; and a life so given should not be ill-bestowed. I cannot see the light; but there must be a ray somewhere in this blackness." She paused, then whispered hurriedly: "Go to him—it is my wish; to-night, if possible. Tell him that I understand his meaning now. Say that I am glad—yes, glad—if through me he is made better."

She averted her eyes. A burning blush mounted to her brow.

"Will you go?" she asked.

"I will do anything that you wish, Ginevra."

Cassilis paced the room rapidly for a minute, then returned, halting before her.

"You cannot stay here. Something must be done for you to-night. I will telegraph at once to Mr. Medlicott, and you must go back to Champneys."

"No," she returned resolutely; "I will not go back. I will stay with my mother."

He stood, struck dumb by her determination. As he had dragged her from a scene of contamination at Singapore, so would he fain now have borne her away from this house, than which, he felt, earth held no more unfitting place for her to remain. It had not entered his mind that she would make any resistance. He had fancied in the first rush of thought which had followed the discovery of her presence here, that her own impulse would be to fly with hatred from the mother in whose person motherhood seemed profaned. It was impossible for him to comprehend what was indeed the case, that after the shock of revelation, and since the removal of Oscar, her imagination had turned from the horror and repulsiveness of the position, and now grasped only the fact of Clémence's misery and imminent need, and a certain fleshless and spiritual significance in the martyrdom she was called upon to endure. The singularity of her education, the yearnings of her childhood, the exaltation of a highly wrought temperament, the innate purity of her nature, and her intense capacity for self-devotion to the cause of love or duty—all these influences came into force now within her, and determined impulse and course of action.

"I will stay with my mother," she reiterated.

"Ginevra," exclaimed Will, "have you no pity upon yourself?"

"Oh, you do not understand me," said Ginevra mournfully. "The strongest tie left me binds me here. It is you who are not pitiful, since you wish to break it. Have you so little knowledge of a woman's heart?"

She turned towards him, and her eyes met his imploringly for an instant; then were lowered, and again a blush overspread her face, dying away and leaving it pallid and cold as marble.

"I wish to remember only that Fate has brought me to my mother, and that she may be dying. . . . Oh, I know not what I wish—unless, indeed, the past might be blotted out for one hour, and that I might go to her and lay my head upon her breast, and hear her call me by the same sweet names as when she held me in her arms at Birrali. . . . And I did not know—I would not say 'Mother.' . . . Yet I loved her. I loved her even then. Why was I so blind?"

She stood silent, as though her thoughts had travelled backward, then awakening to the present, exclaimed—

"You must not stay here. Go to her. It is she who needs you, not I."

"Ginevra!" cried Will, "can I do nothing for you?"

"Nothing now. Let me watch and wait. You will not bid me go away," she added in a diffident manner which was inexpressibly touching. "If you say that things are not right for me to do, even when my own impulse is strong, I must be guided by you a little; I cannot trust myself. I know nothing. I have no one to help me but you. . . . Say that you do not wish me to go back to Champneys? I could not; it would be like treading on fiery thorns."

"Ginevra, you rebuke me. I will never bid you act against your impulses. In them your true, pure nature speaks. You shall remain. But it is impossible that you can be with—your mother. She is delirious; she is in the greatest danger. If she were to see you now I could not answer for her life."

Ginevra bowed her head submissively. And then hateful consciousness seemed for a moment to rise and suffocate her. "Help me to feel pity for her," she murmured wildly. "Help me to struggle against what is wicked—horrible. Don't let me hate her. Don't let me hate myself. Help me to forget myself in her suffering. Let me be near, so that I may know the best and the worst. Oh, death is sometimes kind! I would not have her die; and yet I cannot bear that she should live—and remember."

She covered her face with her hands; and her slender frame shook with sobs. He waited till the outburst had passed. To alleviate her suffering was impossible.

At last he said: "It would not be right to keep your guardian in suspense and anxiety. I must let him know that you are here."

"As you will—you are very good to me. I do trust you."

He could not speak for a moment. "And now," he said, making an effort to master himself, "I must leave you, for I am needed upstairs. You must have food and wine; I will send some one to you. Promise me that you will eat, and that you will try to sleep."

"Sleep!" A wan smile played about her lips. "Yes, I will sleep if I can—but not to-night."

Reluctantly he left her, and went to Clémence's room, where

for some time he remained watching. The nurse, a staid severe-looking woman who had seen much hospital service, was in attendance. To her care Cassilis commended his patient. Then, under pretext of preserving quietness in the house, he announced to Ellen his intention of taking Oscar away; and bade her prepare the boy for departure.

When he came out of the sick-room, he saw that Ginevra had stationed herself near its threshold. She resisted his entreaties and efforts to lead her away, saying piteously: "I can't go—I can't stay in that room alone. Let me stand here for a little while."

But he took her hands as though she had been a child, and led her into the little chamber which had been prepared for her. He brought her nourishment, and stood over her, exhorting her to eat and drink. She obeyed in a passive manner; and promised to try and rest. As he was leaving her she whispered: "You will do as you promised."

He knew that she alluded to her request that he would see Brian, and with a heavy heart went forth to do her bidding.

CHAPTER XII.

NATURE CONSOLES.

To find Brian that night seemed at first an impossibility; nevertheless, after he had taken Oscar to Bryanston Square, and had consigned him into the housekeeper's charge, Will set forth on his quest.

He went first to his cousin's club; but there nothing was known of Colonel Gilmore's whereabouts. At Sir Michael's house in Brook Street the servants were equally ignorant, nor were tidings of him to be gained in other haunts to which Will hopelessly penetrated. It was now getting late; and in his perplexity Will suddenly bethought himself of certain bachelor lodgings in Sackville Street, superintended by a former cook in the family, an abode which, before his exile to Australia, Brian had been in the habit of frequenting. Here he sought his cousin; and the first words of Mrs. Prickett, the landlady, as she opened the door, "It's like old

times, Dr. Cassilis, to see you and Colonel Gilmore here again," assured him that his vague surmise had been correct.

Yes. Colonel Gilmore had arrived there at dawn that morning; but what had come to him was more than Mrs. Prickett dared conjecture. Talk of old times! Mrs. Prickett declared that were it not for his marked features and the colour of his hair she should not have recognized her former lodger, so broken-hearted did he look. It was easy to see that he had some terrible trouble upon his mind. What was it? Had he quarrelled with Sir Michael again, or with the young lady he was to marry, whom Mrs. Prickett had heard spoken of as coming from outlandish parts, and who she expected was a handful to manage? or had he had a sunstroke in Australia and gone off his head? Any of these occurrences seemed to Mrs. Prickett of equal probability.

Cassilis evaded the woman's voluble questioning, and ran upstairs to the room which she indicated as tenanted by his cousin. He pushed the door open without knocking and unceremoniously entered. Gilmore was seated before the fire, his eyes fixed in gloomy reverie, his hands clasped behind his head. Writing materials and several letters ready sealed and directed lay upon the table at his elbow. He glanced up at the advancing figure without speaking or showing any sign of recognition, and Will saw then how fearfully he was changed. He looked haggard, gaunt, life-weary. His eyes were red-rimmed and lustreless. Every feature bore the stamp of hopeless misery and remorse.

There was in the minds of both men a consciousness which forbade conventional greeting. For some moments neither spoke. The situation was too grave, too appalling, to admit of explanation or demonstration. Moral convulsions of the most violent description show few external traces.

The thoughts of both flowed in the same channel; the two antagonistic minds were subtly connected Cassilis placed his hat upon the table and walked to the fireplace, where he stood facing Brian.

"I am sorry for you," he said at length, abruptly.

"Don't speak in that way. I neither desire nor deserve compassion."

"I had some trouble to find you," Will went on. "It is a good thing that I have succeeded at last. You don't look fit to be alone. What are you going to do?"

"Who sent you here?" asked Brian eagerly, but taking no notice of the question. "How did you know that I wanted you? I wrote to you an hour ago, and then tore up the letter. . . . Will, do you know what it is to be unable to meet the look of fellow-man? No—of course not; nor did I till three days ago. Since then I have felt myself branded and cursed like another Cain. Speak out. You seem to have heard already that I am in trouble. That accounts for your presence, doesn't it? We have hardly met since"—Brian's voice shook—"since I left you to arrange about little Oscar's schooling—and—other things. You and I never seem quite to hit it off when I am sailing along prosperously, but when the devil has got hold of me I am in the habit of turning like a coward to you."

Will waited deliberately before he replied—

"No impulse of compassion, no desire to serve you, would have brought me here to-night if—— Something stronger than considerations of that kind compelled me to come. I may be hard, but at least I am true. You have forfeited sympathy, and it would be a mockery to offer it."

Brian gazed wildly at his cousin. "You cannot know everything," he exclaimed. Then his head drooped; his whole attitude appeared that of a man out of whom all power of self-vindication had been crushed. "I am glad that you have come, no matter what your motive may have been," he added, in a different tone. "Will," he continued, his voice lowered almost to a whisper, "I understand what Œdipus felt when he put out his eyes. . . . A horrible thing has come upon me—so horrible that I cannot speak it."

"There is no need. I know everything."

"You have seen Clémence?"

"I left her an hour ago. She is dangerously ill. I do not think that she will live. . . . And Ginevra is in her house."

"My God!" cried Gilmore. "You knew the truth, and yet you allowed her to remain?"

"She also knows the truth. I too felt that she must be snatched away as from something corrupt; but she resisted my entreaties. There are mysteries in human nature which I cannot pretend to fathom; the heart of a pure woman is one of them. Ginevra is an angel. Would an angel have gone away at such a crisis?"

"Oh, Will, it is horrible! it is unnatural!" groaned Gil-

more. "You should have forced her to go with you. She will die—my innocent lamb—my Ginevra!"

"No," answered Cassilis, with a bitterness which he did not try to hide; "she will not die. She will live—a sacrifice for the sins of those whom she has loved. The instinct which at this moment prompts her to cling to that unhappy woman lifts her above our comprehension. It is the voice of Nature speaking in her bosom."

"Ginevra never knew her mother," exclaimed Gilmore in a bewildered tone.

"Yes. So much I have learned from her own broken words, and from Clémence's wanderings. They have met more than once: the first time at Birrali, when there was no definite recognition between mother and child."

Then there flashed into Brian's memory Clémence's wild words, unnoted in the frenzy of dreadful discovery, telling of how she had lain in wait in the Birrali gorge, and, in defiance of her husband's commands, had snatched an interview with her daughter. Now with lightning-like swiftness his mind divined the facts of the case: Ginevra had in some way become aware of the identity of her mother with the mysterious woman who had doubtless strongly influenced her imagination, and in the first violent shock of misery had fled to her for consolation.

He buried his head in his hands. His frame shook in the conflict with emotion which he was determined to repress. To dwell upon his own wretchedness seemed mockery and sacrilege. But there broke from him, in spite of his efforts, passionate words.

"Oh, Will, this is hard—this is bitter. . . . This is retribution even greater than I deserve."

Cassilis looked on, suffering intensely, suffering from the knowledge that his soul was dry and barren of sympathy. Fierce repulsion displaced compassion and burned in his breast. He was powerless to speak. What was there that he could say in pity or consolation, when wherever his eyes turned they saw the image of Ginevra? The air was Ginevra. Her mournful gaze met his in space. The silence lasted long. At length Gilmore lifted his face, now calm.

"You say that you have seen Ginevra. Then she must have left Champneys this morning. I might have known that she would fly like a stricken dove. For God's sake, tell

me everything. If you could realize how during this long day I have yearned for news of her. My murdered love!"

"It is she who has sent me here to-night. I have brought you a message," answered Will; and he repeated almost as she had uttered them, Ginevra's broken words; but while he spoke he would not meet Brian's eyes, which were fixed devouringly upon his face.

"Will, this is kind; this is good of you. Tell me everything, I implore. Have you recollected all? Are you certain that she said nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Tell me how she looked," cried Gilmore. "Was she pale? Had she been weeping? Did she appear ill—worn? Ah, Heaven, what a night of agony she must have endured! Were her eyes wild? Does she, then, not shrink from me with loathing? Angel that she is! did I not say well that in her martyrdom lay my hope of purification? Tell me everything, Will—everything."

In measured tones, and with almost a sense of grim satisfaction, as he beheld Brian wince and again bow his head upon his hands, Will described Ginevra's appearance and condition, softening no harrowing detail of her suffering. But there came over him a reaction of feeling when Brian spoke in deep sadness.

"Will, if you could imagine a devoted mother compelled to slay her first-born and best-beloved—compelled to watch its death agonies, as she held the quivering blade in its breast, you would in part realize what at his moment I am suffering."

"And you also," said Will, sternly, "can understand what Clémence has suffered. Mercifully, now, her mind wanders, and cannot grasp realities. Ginevra is her first-born, her best-beloved."

"Clémence!" ejaculated Brian. "Another victim! and one once not less innocent. Will, as I have sat here alone to-day, maddened and miserable, with all my senses sharpened to acute understanding, I have had a glimpse of the true tortures of the damned. Think of following through generations, backward and onward, the chain of terrible results which one sin of our own has forged—the guiltless sacrificed—the heritage of shame and sorrow and evil propensity descending upon the yet unborn. This is law; this is justice; this—this is hell."

Will was deeply moved. "Yes, yes," he exclaimed with agitation. "One might drive one's self mad by thoughts like these. Now you touch upon the most saddening mystery of existence. But do not dwell upon it while you are in this state. What is done cannot be undone, and remorse is only of avail in stirring to fresh effort. . . . Brian, I am talking like a prig or a priest. All this is only the husk of feeling. I *do* feel for you. But it is difficult—you forget, I have just left *her*."

"And you love her?" said Brian, solemnly.

Cassilis did not reply for a moment.

"I do love her," he said at length, looking straight into his cousin's eyes. "I loved her, and told her so, before I knew that she had promised to be your wife. When I had learned the truth I tried, in so far as honour and respect for her innocence permitted, to awaken in her mind distrust towards you. I wished to break the marriage—not—and I declare this solemnly—alone from the selfish desire to gain her for myself."

"You thought—and rightly—that I was unworthy of her?"

Will gravely bowed his head. "You know what my ideas have always been with regard to your relations with Clémence. I never held to the world's creed, which has one law for the woman, another for the man. Honour, duty, obligations to your children commanded you to cleave to her. You had committed a wrong which should have established the strongest claim upon your conscience. I say nothing of love: that must have been murdered. You ought to have remained with her in England, or to have taken her to Australia, and there braved the worst." He paused, then added, almost in the words he had used to Ginevra, "It was not fit that the fresh hopes of an innocent girl should be wedded to shameful secrets such as yours."

"Were *you*, then, so without reproach?"

"What man is blameless?" cried Will, passionately; "but at least—at least my life had not been like yours."

Gilmore was silent for a time.

"And you love her still?" he asked suddenly, directing a piercing glance towards his cousin.

"Is it likely that I should change in less than a year?" exclaimed Will. "I would gladly lay down my life if by so

doing I could make you what she once believed you, undo this mesh of sin and fatality, and restore to her her lost happiness as your promised wife. That is how I love her."

"You will never win her love," said Gilmore, thoughtfully, and with unutterable sadness. "Her heart was wholly mine, and—I have broken it."

"Do you imagine that any selfish hope of that kind lies in my mind?" cried Will with angry vehemence. "Can you so wrong her nature and mine? Her sorrow is the grave in which all unworthy thoughts are buried. . . . Oh, that I should need to say this!" He turned impetuously and walked to the window, still uncurtained, where he stood, his eyes straining into the gloom of a fog which had risen, through which the lamps shone dim and unreal as any rays of hope that might brighten his own future.

"I am going away," said Brian, dully, "whither I do not know yet; probably to America. Little Fretterly can never be my home. The only service that I can render *her* now is to spare her the sight of my face, the sound of my name. It shall be my prayer that she may forget me. But I—waking or sleeping—I must always feel her near me. In the remembrance of her love and purity will be my sweetest, saddest comfort. Will, you can do me a kindness. You will see her often; you will watch over her as a brother. For the rest, you are right—her sorrow is a grave. Write to me of her sometimes. If you can ever tell me that her life is not quite blighted, it will be—it will be——" A sob choked his voice.

"I will try to do as you wish," said Will.

He had returned to his former position by the fireplace, and Brian half held out his hand; but Will did not respond to the movement. He looked at his watch.

"It is very late, and we have said all that is possible now. I must go again to Madame Dessolles. Gilmore," he added impulsively, "you would be better at my house than here. Come back with me."

A dull gleam of relief shot from Brian's eyes. "I must see you again," he said in a troubled way. "There is a great deal to be decided, in which you must help me. Before I leave England arrangements must be made. Clémence—the children—must be considered. It is impossible that we can ever meet again; but if she will consent I should like to make some amends—to bring up the boy in a more fitting manner."

"You do not realize how ill she is."

"Will she die?"

"I cannot say yet; but I think it highly probable that the worst may be expected."

"*Is* it the worst?" said Brian, almost in the tone which Ginevra had used when speaking to the same effect. "Would not life have for her more bitterness than death? God help me: what have I done?" He started to his feet and paced the room in intense agitation. "Will, I must go with you. To spend another night alone with the hideous spectres of these blasted lives is more than I can bear. Oh, Will, why should I, of all men, have loved Ginevra? Why should she have been chosen as the victim of this inscrutable fatality? What can I do? oh, what can I do?"

"Be a man; and make of your son's life a fresh mainspring for your own—a new starting-point towards good. Come, we will go."

Presently they were driving towards Bryanston Square.

He ordered the cab to wait, and took Brian straight upstairs to a room which was kept in readiness for the accommodation of stray visitors. Perhaps he knew or guessed that it was already tenanted. Will's school-boy nephews had been the last occupants of the chamber. There were in it two beds, a little distance from each other. In one of these now lay a sleeping boy, with rounded cheek and dark clustering curls pressed against the pillow. One arm was thrown above the boy's head, and the curved lips—the only feature in which Oscar resembled his mother—were drooped at the corners, giving an expression of helplessness and appeal which, combined with the air of youthful manliness, was inexpressibly touching. Gilmore started violently as he entered when, his eyes falling upon the bed, he recognized his son.

"These are your quarters, Brian," said Will, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact tone. "I brought Oscar away this evening from Holdborough Terrace. Scarlet fever has broken out at his school, and he had been sent home. I see that Mrs. Bruce has put him here. You do not object to his companionship for to-night? If so, I dare say that she can manage a shake-down for him elsewhere."

"No," answered Brian, constrainedly; "it is a pity to disturb him. And"—he laughed in grim fashion—"who should have a better right than he to be my companion?"

Will turned towards the door. "I will leave you now. Ask for whatever you want; and don't expect to see me again to-night."

Gilmore looked after him with longing in his face, as though he would fain have spoken, but nothing came forth but a groan; and in a moment Will had hurried away.

Left alone, Brian locked the door, and seated himself upon the bed, with his eyes fixed upon the sleeping child. The outstretched figure, in its careless *abandon* of slumber, seemed by contrast to mock his own despair. He felt within him a strange warring of his impulses. There was something almost grotesque in the grim torment of the situation. Was this to be the end of his yearnings after domesticity and right living—his sweet dreams of wedded happiness? . . .

To think of the fate either of Clémence or Ginevra was agony too acute. His thoughts were perforce thrust back upon himself. Must all those tender aspirations which had consecrated the dawn of new life—alas! now swallowed up in densest blackness—and which had seemed to promise him moral redemption, henceforth be fulfilled in the care of this unfortunate boy—the living reminder of his sin?

He hated the child for being of his own flesh and blood. He loathed himself with a twice-told loathing. . . . And his misery crushed him down. There was no outlet for hope. A dead wall enclosed him—a wall which he himself had reared.

The boy stirred in his sleep, and flung his arm across the pillow, so that his fingers came into contact with those of his father.

Brian would have recoiled from the unconscious touch, but instinct rose up strong and forbade. As if constrained against himself, he took the little hand very gently in his own. It was as though he had been battling against nature, and nature had triumphed. . . . And now a thrill indescribable stirred his heart. It was a feeling he had never known before. A curious softness and sense of effusion, and then a sort of placid sadness and far-awayness from the actual life, like the lulling of pain by an anæsthetic, crept over him. . . . There was a rift in the blackness of the future. Effort did not appear so absolutely motiveless.

His fingers involuntarily tightened. The boy opened for a moment wide dream-held eyes, which met Brian's look and

closed again instantly without a ray of alarm or recognition. The glance, so uncomprehending, so entirely confiding, smote Brian as though he had been a woman self-detected in falsity to the highest instincts of womanhood. There was in him then more of the woman's nature than of the man's. . . . And yet, being a man and a father, it was no shame to him that he wept.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEYOND THESE VOICES THERE IS PEACE.

All that night Clémence Dessolles lay in a state of fluctuating delirium, while Dr. Cassilis kept watch by her bedside. No sleep visited Ginevra's eyes; but in the morning she was up and dressed, waiting for the summons which Will had promised she should receive when either the end approached or her mother desired her presence.

The nurse came to her bringing food, and bearing tidings from the sick room. The woman lingered while she could, and at last led Ginevra down into the deserted and forlorn-looking drawing-room, where she lit the fire, and heaped up books and such objects of distraction as she fancied might divert the unhappy girl from her grief.

But Ginevra was strangely passive, and indeed it seemed to Will, when he approached her a little later, that the martyr's spirit had entered into her frame, purifying her from all feeling that was not wholly spiritual, and transfiguring her face into that of an angel.

He told her that Clémence was very ill, but that not yet might she enter her mother's chamber. He bade her be brave and patient. He had telegraphed for Mr. Medlicott, whom he expected would arrive that morning. He was turning away, for the sight of her was too painful—more painful now in her calmness than when, the night before, misery and excitement had mastered her; but her beseeching eyes arrested him. He came back to her side and took her hand.

"I have done what you wished," he said, comprehending her wordless inquiry. "Last night I went to Brian; I

brought him to my own house. He is in the deepest trouble; but there is hope for him in the future; and the thought of you is his comfort, for you have taught him to believe in good. Yours has been the angel's hand which has pointed towards a better life."

He hurried away, dreading again to meet her eyes; and she was left alone. Presently the door was timidly opened, and little Jenny approached, and after the manner of children and animals, stood looking at her with a sort of wistful, sympathetic curiosity.

Ginevra did not wince beneath the gaze. It seemed to soothe rather than to irritate. The little girl had her arms full of dolls, and began to enact her nursery dramas before the fire. But one puppet was in sore need of apparel to suit the exigencies of her part; another was limp and woeful by reason of a shrunken leg, which required refilling; and a third—a rag baby, dear to the child's heart—had through repeated ablutions faded in face to a whitey brown neutral tint, and would, Jenny pathetically observed, be so much prettier if the kind lady would give it new eyes and eyebrows and a nice red mouth. Thereupon a box of paints was produced. Jenny's appeals could not be gainsaid; and Ginevra —in her mind a vague wonder whether she were bereft of reason, so unnatural did her position seem—found herself mechanically adorning the blank disc with deep blue saucer-like orbs and simpering carmine lips; and presently the listless fingers were moving a needle to and fro, and the stupefied brain was resolving the difficult problem how to manufacture a "real lady's gown" out of the shreds of faded finery which Jenny had piled upon the floor.

While they were thus employed, and while, with that unconscious irony of childish mirth, Jenny was laughing in delighted approval, the nurse appeared with a grave face, and begged that the little girl might be kept very quiet, for that Madame Dessolles was worse. She would forthwith have delivered Jenny up to Ellen, and consigned the dolls to the basement, had not the child wept and prayed piteously to be allowed to stay with her new friend. Ginevra, her nerves strung again to fresh effort, her heart pierced in some inexplicable fashion by Jenny's tears and clinging touch, took the little girl into her lap and went back in memory to the days of her own childhood, crooning in low tones some of the old

Australian songs, and telling over again the familiar fairy tales with which, years ago at Birrali, Nancy Gryce had been wont to wile away the hours.

And if her voice faltered or her eyes grew dim, Jenny only pressed her arm sympathetically, and remarked in a whisper, "That's a nice story. Go on, Ginevra. And how high was the mountain that the giant lived in?"

"High, high as the clouds," answered Ginevra, abstractedly.

"But if it was as high as that he could just have stepped over into heaven, Ginevra," remarked Jenny, with puzzled childish theology. "Do giants like to eat little children in heaven? But perhaps he is good now," she added, with an air of reassurance. "All people are good when they die, aren't they? They can't do any more harm when their bodies are under the ground?"

"No, no more harm. There's no sin or shame or misery in the grave. Death is best," murmured Ginevra, wildly.

In an ungovernable impulse she caught the child to her bosom and whispered passionately, "My heart is breaking, Jenny. What shall I do? Where shall I go?" and the child sobbed in sympathy, pressing her cheek against the elder wet one, whispering—

"You mustn't cry. Jenny loves you. You mustn't go away and leave Jenny." Then a new fear seemed to smite her, and she added, mournfully, "Do you want to go to heaven with my mammy? Ellen says that God is going to take her away, and that by-and-by I shall see her, when she is an angel with white wings. And I must try not to mind, because she will be well then. . . . I do try not to mind, Ginevra; and I must not cry because nurse does not like me to make a noise, and God will be angry; but I'd rather have my mammy without the wings, just as she used to be."

Ginevra burst into new sobs, and clasped the child closer.

"Don't cry," whispered Jenny, anxiously. "It makes me feel worse. Tell me another story, Ginevra. I like your stories. Tell me again about the black picaninny that got lost in the scrub, and the bottle trees that turned into great white spirits and kept it all safe."

* * * * * *

There was a sound of confused voices in the passage. That of Will Cassilis, low, agitated, and Mr. Medlicott's strident tones hushed into a loud whisper, as he uttered ejaculations

of horror and dismay. The hurried colloquy lasted but a few minutes, and then steps passed up the stairs. Dr. Cassilis had returned to his watch, and Ginevra knew that her guardian had come.

She rose, loosening her arms from about the child. Little Jenny sank once more upon the hearthrug amid her dolls. The door opened. Mr. Medlicott entered, looking awe-stricken, as though he had been face to face with a spectre. He was followed by his wife, her usually florid cheeks pale, tears starting from her eyes. She went straight to Ginevra, and folded the young girl in her arms in a motherly embrace.

"Oh, my darling! oh, my poor lamb!" was all she could say.

But words were not needed. At the mere thought of spoken sympathy Ginevra winced, as though under physical pain. Nevertheless, as she felt the womanly touch, and wept with her head upon Mrs. Medlicott's bosom, there came over her a sense of protection and anchorage. The sight of those two familiar faces and sound of voices, not now jarring, brought her back as it were to existence and to reality, and made her feel less forlorn and storm-tossed. To her dazed consciousness they seemed to represent the old happy shielded life—now so far away. She sobbed unrestrainedly, clinging convulsively to Mrs. Medlicott's arm, and brought nearer to her during this moment of anguish than she could have been brought by years of commonplace companionship.

"Oh, my little one!" cried the poor lady, all the mother in her nature roused, her heart bleeding with sorrow and indignation. "They might have spared you this. You would have been better guarded if I had had my way. My loving darling. My lamb among wolves. We will take you home and try to comfort you."

"No, no," exclaimed Ginevra, in wild entreaty; "not home—not yet. I must stay here till—till it is decided whether it is to be life or death. . . . She is my mother."

Mr. Medlicott came forward. He was deeply moved: many times had he brushed away a tear; and his voice broke when, in a somewhat abrupt fashion, but with a tact which sprang from genuine solicitude and affection, he addressed his ward.

"My dear, everything shall be as you wish. We are here only to watch over you, and to do what we can to help you.

But it shall be in your own way. We don't want to interfere. We want only to heal, as best we can, your broken heart." . . . He paused, and taking Ginevra's hand between his own, fondled and kissed it with a reverential tenderness which, in his hitherto uncomplicated relations with life, he had perhaps never before exhibited. He went on with awkward haste. "We were thinking, Mrs. Medlicott and I, as we came up in the train to-day, that Champneys is cold and unhealthy at this season, and that it would be well—that, in fact, we would shut up the house for the present and go south, to Rome, Naples, whichever place you might prefer. There's nothing like change of scene for getting over—for removing sorrowful impressions. And everything shall be like a dream. You shall not be wounded by spoken pity or regrets. That is what you would wish. Yes, I know. There, there, don't cry—yes, cry on if it will do you good. Ginevra, my love, you have grown into our very hearts, and are as close to us as our own daughters—closer, perhaps, for they are all married and separated from us. The object of our lives shall be to make you happy."

Ginevra pressed his hand gratefully, and suffered herself to be led to the sofa and soothed and caressed. Mrs. Medlicott's eyes, wandering towards the hearthrug, encountered the wistful surprised gaze of little Jenny. A blush mounted to her face; and involuntarily she interposed her matronly form between her ward and the child. In the action there was a woman's instinctive recoil from that which offends against the finest susceptibilities of her sex.

"Go away," she said sternly; then added in quavering, self-reproachful tones, as the child's lips drooped, and tears gathered upon her lashes, "I dare say you are a good little girl. I am not angry with you; but take your dolls and go away."

Jenny obeyed, only casting back ere she left the room a glance of piteous reproach at Ginevra, who, in a contradictory impulse of tenderness, half rose and stretched out her arms.

"Oh, let her go," said Mrs. Medlicott in pained irritation, and Ginevra sank back again.

Presently Dr. Cassilis entered. He had descended from Clémence's room, and looked grave and awed. He went straight to Ginevra and took her hand.

"The end is very near," he said solemnly. "She has

intervals of consciousness, and calls imploringly for you. Will you come ?"

Ginevra rose without a word, and he, still holding her hand, led her to the threshold of her mother's chamber. Here he paused; and his eyes were bent in sorrow and tenderness upon her face.

"You must prepare yourself for a great change," he said, in a tone of mournful anxiety. "You are brave—devoted; but this may be more than your strength can bear. . . . My heart aches for your suffering. And I cannot share it. I cannot speak of it. I can do nothing. . . ."

Ginevra checked his sad outburst by a look upwards of childlike faith and appeal. She withdrew her hand from his, as though she had reached a crisis in which no sympathy could be of avail.

"Let me go to her," she said simply; and it seemed to Will that her expression might have been that of a Christian maiden preparing to face alone the terrors of the arena.

He opened the door of the darkened chamber, and silently pointed to the bed, where at first all appeared white—the clothes, the shrouded form, and the face lying corse-like upon the pillows—till could be discerned the hollow of sunken cheeks, the dark ghostly eyes, the deep shadows, and pencilled outline of brow and lash. Could this be Clémence—this living spectre, whose gaze, bright, yearning, fastening itself in an agony of hope and dread upon Ginevra's face, was all that told of any connecting link with earth ?

The pale lips moved in an inarticulate murmur. A quick shudder, like an electric shock, convulsed the girl's frame. For an instant she hesitated—then advanced; her arms were stretched forth; she bent low over the bed. "*Mother !*" she whispered, in tones of passionate yearning. . . . A feeble hand was raised in the effort to clasp the bowed neck; lips met in a long solemn kiss; and, at last, mother and child were united.

Then Ginevra felt the form which she held grow tense, and the lips relax and become cold and rigid. She slipped down on her knees, and gazed in agony at the motionless face, uttering a little smothered cry. Clémence's eyes were closed; the features were still and pallid; it was as though life had completely fled. In a second Will and the nurse were at the bedside. But the soul had not passed its confines.

The flickering pulse yet beat, and during the long swoon which followed was the only sign that she still breathed.

For hours Ginevra sat watching for the ray of consciousness which was so long in returning. At last there was a quiver of the lips upon which her gaze was fixed—a faint pressure by the fingers round which her own were closed. She bent forward in breathless longing for the words that came not. Past, present, future—all sadness, bitterness, and repulsion were merged in the intense yearning which she felt for one more token of love, one word in forgiveness of an unconsciously committed wrong. The short winter's day had waned, and the room was full of shadows. All sense of time had gone from Ginevra's mind. It might have been morn or evening; she knew not. There was something unearthly in the growing dimness; it intensified the weird solemnity of the scene. Strange fancies passed through her imagination. For her too the cord of existence seemed to have been cut. Intuition was sharpened. She was a child again at Birrali; and she marvelled no longer at her father's coldness and self-absorption. The hidden current of his thoughts flowed now clear before her, and she knew why he had been hard and silent, and why he had steeled himself against her affection. And he had died alone. . . .

And now she stood upon the brink of a fathomless gulf, straining with earth-bound eyes towards the land of shades. The childish doubts, the misty yearnings, had unconsciously to herself become conviction. Here the dead philosopher had his appointed place. . . . Oh, might she but send a message by this departing soul—a prayer that charity and tenderness should greet the wanderer whose sins and struggles were all ended! Might she, the child, but join her voice with that of the suppliant wife, and be the bond which should unite these divorced hearts in spiritual and eternal union!

Her pent-up anguish found vent in the cry, "Mother, mother! speak to me!"

Roused by the appeal, the dying woman opened her eyes, clear and bright in that momentary flash which precedes death.

"My little one," she said, in a voice of inexpressible tenderness, "don't cry any more. Mammy has come back again;" and then she added softly, as though in self-exculpation, "I never meant to stay away—I would not have stayed so long."

Her hand stroked that of Ginevra, and then her fingers gently moved up and down among the bed-clothes, while she crooned as to a sleeping child—

"Hush, baby! Hush, darling! Mammy has come back again."

Then suddenly she raised herself, and, wild and unknowing, her gaze wandered round the room.

"It is dark," she cried. "Is there no one near? Let the sunshine in. Let me have light. . . . David, David!"

She fell back; and thus, her husband's name upon her lips, passed forth into the Unknown.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM MRS. MEDLICOTT TO DR. CASSILIS; DATED THREE YEARS LATER.

Hotel ———, Grasse, South of France.
Feb. 26th, 18—.

"My dear Will,

"Your interesting letter, written shortly after your return from America, has lain long unanswered; but you will, I am sure, forgive my silence when you learn that my husband has been obliged to make another voyage to Australia. He left us a fortnight ago, by the Messageries steamer from Marseilles; and both before and since his departure my time has been so fully occupied by business arrangements, which are rendered doubly troublesome by our long absence from Champneys, that it has been quite impossible for me to find a half-hour in which to thank you for the news you give us of yourself and others, and to enter into all the particulars for which you ask concerning our movements and Ginevra's welfare.

"After Mr. Medlicott had left us we came to this quiet little place among the hills partly because it was thought that the bracing air would benefit the sleeplessness and restlessness from which Ginevra suffers, after having remained some little time by the coast; and also for the reason that her friend, Mrs. St. Quentin, has lately taken a villa in this neighbourhood, and the attachment between them is so

strong, that I am glad to secure Ginevra a companionship which seems to afford her happiness.

"I think that I must have mentioned the St. Quentins in some of my earlier letters. He was the clergyman to whom we owed so much that wretched winter, when, after Ginevra's terrible illness at Champneys, we brought her to Hyères. He was then in a lingering consumption, and died in Switzerland at the end of last year. You have, I know, an unreasonable prejudice against clergymen as a race; but even you would, I think, have admitted that his was one of the most saintly characters possible to meet with in the round of life. I cannot help feeling that his example and teaching have had much to do with the foundation of Ginevra's faith and disposition, if indeed anything were needed to sweeten a nature already so almost perfect. What she has been to me, and what she has taught me during these years of sadness and suffering, no words can tell. She has made me realize the beauty of Christianity as no books or sermons could ever have brought it before me. There is something Christ-like in the sight of a young creature crushed almost to the grave by a sorrow unlike any other sorrow, in that it is removed from spoken sympathy, and that the thought of it must always be accompanied by horror and repulsion—yet rising above it by the very force of her purity. She has consecrated her poor maimed life to the service of those around her, so that wherever she moves a blessing seems to fall, and, as some one said to me the other day, her look and smile are as those of an angel passing. It is wonderful to see the interest and love with which she has already inspired the people in this hotel. There is a sick girl who was almost shunned on account of her fretfulness and selfish murmurings, and who has been a changed person since she beheld the patience and serenity with which Ginevra bears her own sufferings, and the kindness and forethought by which she lightens those of others. Our darling's face, sweet and beautiful as it is, bears unmistakably the traces of deep sorrow; and I think that to this fact her influence is greatly owing. Then there is a dying mother, whose last days are embittered by the thought of leaving her only child to the care of strangers—to her Ginevra is a messenger of comfort; and a soured hypochondriac, whose event of the day is Ginevra's visit, whom she has contrived to interest in books and work, thus drawing

her out of the circle of her own fancied grievances and ailments. But you know what the life is here, and into what close relations one is thrown with one's fellow-creatures; I might multiply examples endlessly. And to think that this angel is the daughter of that hard, cold, philosophical Dr. Rolt, and that the Birrali training has borne such fruits as these!

"But to return to the St. Quentins. We left Ginevra under their care in Switzerland the summer before last, when we made our hurried visit to England. She was with them again last year at the time of his death, and this has strongly cemented the bond between her and Mrs. St. Quentin, who clings to Ginevra as one to whom she can talk unreservedly of her late husband, his work, and several charitable schemes which she is intent upon carrying out. Mrs. St. Quentin is a placid-looking, Madonna-like woman, with a large fund of enthusiasm, a most unselfish heart, and considerable force of character. Her health is delicate; she is somewhat given to literary pursuits; has decided to make her home in the South, and would gladly have the prospect of a companion so congenial to her as Ginevra.

"And now, my dear Will, I come to what is in reality the gist of this letter. You know the difficulties of our position: how uncongenial to Mr. Medlicott is this wandering life abroad, and how desirable we feel it that Champneys should again become our permanent home. Every year there is the same conflict between duty and affection, and I feel that I can no longer expect my husband to put on one side his interests and inclinations.

"Next year we must return for good. The doctors declare it quite impossible that Ginevra can ever again winter in England. Though the disease in her lungs is arrested, her life must always be an uncertain one, and can only be prolonged by the greatest care and by residence in a warm climate. Apart from this, her repugnance to passing even a few weeks in Woodfordshire is so marked and so painful that I dare not urge her returning for the summer to Champneys. The feeling is not to be wondered at when one considers what association the very name must bear for her; but I dread its becoming morbid, and am most anxious that she should be forced to brace herself in an effort to conquer this shrinking. I cannot help thinking that you, who have great influence

over her, and who are inextricably connected with these painful events in her life, might be of the utmost service in diverting her thoughts from their present groove. She is too young to be a complete sacrifice for the sins of others. Why, if her health continues to improve, should she not marry and forget past troubles in new happiness? Her mind is now hovering over the notion of casting in her lot with that of Mrs. St. Quentin. She is deeply troubled at being the cause of our exile from home, and looks upon the scheme as a solution of all perlexities; also, I fancy, that there is in her heart a hope of Colonel Gilmore's return to Fretterly if he be assured of her continued absence from England. I gave her your letter, thinking it well that she should read your description of his life in America, and of the interest and comfort he finds in his son, and that she should know of the welfare of that unfortunate little girl, of whose safe and happy bringing up I am glad to learn. But I cannot pursue this subject. Ginevra returned me the letter without a word, and soon afterwards left the room. Later in the evening she rejoined us, and was placid in her manner as usual, but I could see by her red and swollen eyes that she had been weeping bitterly.

"My suggestion is that you should, if you have no other plans, and are as deeply interested as I suspect in Ginevra's well-being, come out here at once. I have a firmly implanted idea that your society will do much towards healing the old wounds. Think, she is not yet twenty-one, she is rich, beautiful, and has a heart overflowing with sympathy and affection. Is there a being upon earth less fitted for a lonely life, or more calculated to be happy in the way which is sweetest to a woman?

"Come as soon as you can, and give your aid towards accomplishing what I so much long for. Ginevra has just come in with Mrs. St. Quentin from a walk. She is looking well, better and brighter than I have seen her since her trouble crushed her down. There is a faint pink in her cheeks which rivals the anemones that she carries. She seems pleased at the prospect of seeing you, and bids me say that she hopes you will arrive before the acacia is out of bloom.

"Believe me, dear Will,

"Your sincere friend,

"JOANNA MEDLICOTT."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE CATHEDRAL AT GRASSE.

WILL CASSILIS was speeding southward.

Upon the receipt of Mrs. Medlicott's letter, of which, in spite of its long sentences and somewhat stilted phraseology, the real heartfelt motive was only too apparent, he had left London immediately, and had journeyed on through France without break. During the dark hours, while his fellow-travellers breathed the stertorous breath of slumber, he had sat huddled together in a corner of the railway carriage, his body in enforced quiescence, his nerves vibrating, and thoughts so intense filling his mind that to sleep was an impossibility.

All night the moon shone full and clear in heaven. The landscape seemed to flit before Will's fixed eyes—trees, hedgerows, gleaming stretches of field and meadow, white houses and dark sentinel-like cypresses—all shadowy and unreal as the background of a vivid dream. Far on the horizon pallid clouds, like figures with outstretched arms, appeared to beckon him onward. Wrung from his heart came the cry, "Ginevra! Ginevra!" never drowned by the roar of the train, the noise of stoppage, or the monotonous calls of the guard; while always before him he beheld that sweet face, now bright with youthful hope and love as when it had first smiled upon him at Singapore, now sad in sympathy with his sorrow, now, pitiful image! convulsed in dumb agony and passionate protest against the merciless fate which had promised bliss and had bestowed horror.

At last grey dawn broke. The ghostly shadows stole down and melted into the mist which yet lingered over the valleys. The air struck chill, and a shiver recalled Cassilis to the present. He roused himself to wrap his plaid more closely round him; and then from very weariness his head drooped, his eyes closed, and he fell into a short troubled sleep.

When he awoke Marseilles was reached. Sunshine reigned over the land. He was in the region of vines and fig-trees, of light and warmth. The earth looked heat-baked, and the olives cast grateful shadows upon the anemone-spangled slopes. Again the vision of Ginevra rose before him at the

sight of a line of lank eucalyptus trees, and of an acacia casting down its yellow bloom.

And now he was winding among the granite cliffs and fir-grown gorges of the Esterel range, with here and there, where the crags drooped, a glimpse of the Mediterranean, blue in its depths and wonderful mottled green in the shallows, framed by red boulders and stone pines. Then to the left, nestling under grey hills, he caught a distant view of the town in which Ginevra was dwelling. Eagerly he leaned forward, straining his eyes till it too was hidden. At last the grove of storm-beaten umbrella pines and the aloe hedges which mark the entrance to Cannes were passed, and there remained only the little stretch of hill and valley between him and Grasse.

It was afternoon when he arrived at this small old-world Provençal town.

A strange shrinking from encountering Ginevra's presence, a desire to lengthen the trembling delight of anticipation, and to delay yet a little longer the meeting upon which his fate rested, now overcame Will. Leaving his luggage to be sent to the hotel, he wandered away from the station, and struck into a little by-street, where the houses, joined by arches overhead, and the rudely paved path, encumbered with oddly dressed dark-eyed children, was barely wide enough to admit of the passage of two pedestrians abreast. Clear-featured, dark-browed women, their glossy hair fastened with gilt pins, and with kerchiefs folded smoothly across their breasts, peered from upper windows, or sat knitting in their doorways, looking up at him to smile and nod *Bon jour*. Peasants with flapping hats and short full shirts looked as though they might have stepped out of a sixteenth-century print. Pannier-laden donkeys shrank into recesses as he passed. Perforated loaves hung upon the doors of the baker's shops, and the bright-hued, curiously shaped pottery jugs and *gargouillettes* ranged below some stall for provisions or ware, added a picturesqueness to the scene all unnoted by Will, whose mind was too keenly alive to its own throbbing thoughts for details such as these to impress him with any distinctness. He paused in the more open space below the square white campanile, which at the furthest distance renders the cathedral at Grasse a conspicuous object in the landscape.

The bells were softly chiming. They had that silvery peal

which may be heard in many of the old country villages, and seemed to invite his entrance. The door stood open. A withered crone hobbled up to him with outstretched hand. A white-haired grand-dame muttered in hoarse *patois*, and held aloft the babe she carried to beseech for alms.

He thrust a coin into the hand of each and went in.

The interior was lofty, and possessed some claim to architectural beauty. The floor was of stone, the chairs and *prie-dieux* of rough wood, but the vaulted ceiling and stone pillars had all the grandeur of age. Time-honoured associations dwelt within the walls. Paintings, some of centuries gone by, others of more modern date, rich in colouring, if indifferent in execution, hung round the altars. Though the images of the saints were tawdry, the Madonna and her babe mere waxen effigies, the place thrilled Will with a deeper sense of hush, solemnity, and remoteness from an unsympathetic world than any other church he had ever visited.

He walked up a side aisle, and seated himself upon one of the chairs which commanded a view of the east altar and of the upper part of the edifice. The former was no very elaborate erection, its most noticeable feature being two gilded angels with half-folded wings and painted faces, towards which a broad ray of light that pierced the west window was travelling along fretwork and pilaster.

In a shadowy side recess was another altar, its tracery emblazoned in crimson and gold, with solemn carved figures guarding, as it were, the cross above. Here in the dimness burned two lights like stars—the one steadfast, the other faint and flickering. Opposite the pulpit a crucified Christ was raised aloft, of which the colouring and execution seemed less unnatural by reason of the obscurity by which it was enveloped.

While Will sat, his eyes wandering from one to the other of the various objects which surrounded him, his conflicting impulses of dread and yearning calmed by the feeling of awe, to which at certain momentous periods of life the souls of men even most material and unimpressionable are susceptible, his ear was attracted by the rustle of drapery and sound of footfalls, and he became aware that two ladies had entered the building. The one walking somewhat in advance of her companion, who had paused to address a peasant woman near the door, was tall and striking in appearance. She was

dressed in widow's garb, with a long veil thrown over her closely fitting bonnet, and forming a frame for one of the sweetest faces of the Madonna type which it could be possible to behold out of a picture by an old master. Sorrow and suffering had refined her features to a spirituality which rendered all other claims to beauty of secondary importance. But even these were strong. The delicate contour, the fine brow, and noble lips might have served as models to a painter. The eyes, which seemed to have been washed clear by weeping, shone with a tender brightness hardly of earth, and had the rapt expression of one whose closest interests are in heaven.

She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but with gaze bent upon the altar took her place directly opposite that of Will, and, without observing him, kneeled down in prayer.

Instinct, and the recollection of Mrs. Medlicott's description, told him that this lady was no other than Ginevra's counsellor and friend, Mrs. St. Quentin. His heart stood still, and then beat again in tumultuous throbs. He dared not turn his head lest he should meet Ginevra's eyes. Her step sounded nearer. There was no need to assure himself that it was she who approached.

She glided into a chair close to her companion, and immediately below the Christ whose gaze seemed directed pityingly towards her. She too prayed; but she did not cover her face, which, as she kneeled, was lifted upwards in an ecstasy of devotion almost sublime. She might have been one of those saints who dare to behold the Father.

Had she changed? . . . There was the same childish, pathetic droop of upper lip, the same blending of innocence and sadness in her expression, the same ripples of golden hair, the curve of brow, and lily-like setting of head. But oh, how sharpened was the outline of features! how transparent the complexion! how deep those violet stains which hollowed the eyes' orbits, and caused them to appear so large and earnest! Will's heart contracted with a spasm of terrible fear. Was she then fulfilling her novitiate for heaven?

As he looked at her there came over him a feeling, half-fantastic, half-superstitious, that he was committing an act of sacrilege in stretching forth lover's arms to this being who belonged so manifestly to a purer sphere. He shrank back, his presumption self-rebuked. . . . And could he dare re-open old wounds by suggestions of a future such as that which

love had once offered her, and which a drear fatality had clothed in tragic horror? Was it not a desecration of his ideal to imagine it possible that Ginevra could love twice? . . . A groan of despair had well-nigh escaped his lips. He made a movement as if to depart. A glance checked his intention.

At this moment the beam of sunshine which had passed athwart the golden wings of one of those images at each side of the altar, touched its face, and to Will's excited fancy glorified the countenance to an almost celestial loveliness.

Hope rose again in his breast. A superstitious impulse of the kind to which at times even the most rational are liable took possession of his being. This ray from the west should be the present arbiter of his destiny. If, ere Ginevra should have risen from her prayer, the face of the angel had again become shadowed, he would leave her silently, his question unasked, his tale unspoken; but if that Divine radiance should still linger upon its brow, he would accept the omen as a sign that upon him might devolve the happy privilege of restoring her to a participation in earth's joys.

He waited, with eyes fixed, in a suspense which scarcely permitted him to breathe. Suddenly from the organ there broke a sweet flute-like melody, seeming to speak of chastened affection and calm but assured happiness. Then it died in a plaintive sigh and changing the minor key, swelled louder in triumphant harmonies. . . . Ginevra rose.

She leaned back, lifting her eyes for a moment to the dying Christ above her, and a smile of ineffable sweetness played about her lips. And still upon the angel's face the heavenly glory rested.

Will was answered.

He stole quietly from the church. Not for his very love's sake would he then have encountered Ginevra's gaze. He walked on through the chill, closed-in streets, coming presently upon the little *Place*, and passing the washing-troughs where the women in their short blue skirts and with crimson-bound heads were chatting merrily as they stooped over their work.

Afternoon was waning. A bright haze had settled upon the distant mountains, while those near were all in shadow, save where long lines of light ran slantwise among the olives. Will followed a rugged path which led away from the town,

past an old red-tiled farmstead, with its two warder-like cypresses, more aged in appearance than the ancient masonry, and up the bold height by which Grasse is overlooked upon the north-west. The exercise afforded relief to his over-strained nerves. There came to him a sense of expansion, almost of exhilaration, as he mounted higher, and beheld wave after wave of distant mountains rolling onward as far as his eye could reach. He did not pause till the summit was gained, and he had descended upon a stony waste, which, bounded by scarped hills upon which light patches of snow still rested, stretched for miles, showing hardly a trace of human occupation.

Seldom had he stood in a region so arid and weird in its solitariness. Involuntarily his thoughts turned to Holman Hunt's great picture, and he imagined a scapegoat laden with the iniquities of a nation turned adrift upon a wilderness such as this seemed to represent. . . . Oh that he too might cast away into the wilderness that burden of sin and suffering which weighted his own and so many other lives!

No tree broke the horizon line. Of vegetation there was none, save stunted herbage and grey lichenous undergrowth creeping over the volcanic-looking boulders of stone with which the waste was strewn.

There appeared to him something significant and fateful in the contrast between this barrenness of desolation and the fertile, undulating country which lay extended below him. Here grey of olives alternated with bright patches of cultivation; farm-houses sent up their smoke through the trees; white roads intersected each other. To the south the sea lay calm and cloud-like meeting the sky. Away in the east might be traced the outlines of Cap d'Antibes, and of the hills rising behind Nice. Low down upon his right a narrow valley, wider at its entrance, and one side closed in by the Esterel range, debouched upon the Bay of Napoule, and, beautiful and misty as the sea itself, seemed to Will's fancy typical of that vague but possible happiness faintly visible in the dawn of the future, the life which might be, or which might have been. . . .

"Ginevra! . . . Beloved! . . . " he whispered rapturously. "My star towards which I have so long and so hopelessly stretched forth yearning arms. . . . Shall I gain you at last?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST SCENE.

At last Will was alone with Ginevra.

They had strolled on to the olive-terraced hill behind the hotel. The trees with their gnarled fantastic trunks and grey-green foliage closed in around them; the ground was thick with blue-bells, violets bloomed in the crevices of a parapet of crumbling stone against which Ginevra leaned, and the air blew sweet with mingled scents of spring flowers. Shadows were lengthening, while valley and sleeping sea seemed to melt together into a haze of rosy grey. The sun dipped behind that barren rise which Will had mounted yesterday, and the far-reaching Esterels were irradiated by its dying glow. The bells in the campanile chimed the hour, and from the quaint old town below floated sounds of children's voices, and of workmen hastening to their homes after the day's labour; but here upon the slopes, save for the whispering of the olives and the faint chirp of birds, all was hushed and peaceful.

Slight as was the ascent, it had tried Ginevra's strength. Her colour came and went in evanescent flushes, her chest heaved with short painful breaths. Will watched her in anxious solicitude. She met his look, smiling seriously.

"I sometimes wonder," she said, "whether I am the same girl who used to run wild over the Birrali plain, and who could climb the steepest crags without ever feeling tired. I think, Dr. Cassilis, that the Australian Ginevra died three years ago.

It was the first allusion that she had made to the terrible crisis in her life. He gently touched her hand, which rested upon the parapet, but in no other manner dared he indicate his sympathy.

She continued thoughtfully and with slight hesitation, as though she were trying to approach a subject upon which it was difficult to enter.

"I like this place; it reminds me of Birrali; and yet why I hardly know. The hills give me a feeling of rest, though they are less grand than the Ubi mountains; and yonder

valley seems more peaceful than the wide lonely plain which I once so loved. I should be glad to think that my life would end here."

"Do not speak so hopelessly, Ginevra," said Will, in husky tones. "I cannot bear that you should look forward to the end of your life."

"It will not be a long one," she replied gravely; "you know that. And it is not wicked to wish for death."

"Yes," cried Will, impetuously; "it is wicked; it is unnatural in the case of one so young, so gifted as you are. Your wrongs have been great. Fate has been cruel to you. Oh, has not my heart bled for your sufferings? Do I not know that you have been crushed to the very earth? But the battered lily may spring up again when the storm has passed. It may put forth fresh blossoms, and once more raise its petals to the sun. Live, Ginevra. Live to be happy, and to make others happier for having known you."

For an instant her eyes seemed to catch the reflection of his fervour. She turned upon him one of her old looks of childlike appeal.

"Tell me what to do," she said simply. "I have been troubled of late, troubled as to what was my duty. I have wished for some one to advise me. I owe so much to Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott; it grieves me to make them unhappy. But I cannot go back to England; that would be more than I could bear, unless it were clearly right. They must not remain here. It is time that they were relieved of the burden which I have been to them. To go away to some new place, where there would be no associations with the past, and where I could begin life afresh, would be happiest for me. . . . But," and her brows worked painfully, "that is impossible. I am too young to live alone. . . . And if I give my promise to remain with Mrs. St. Quentin I can't take it back again."

Will paused before replying, and drew her hands within his. There was a deliberateness in the action which startled Ginevra. The expression of appeal left her face, and gave way to one of embarrassment, almost dread.

"If you would have it so," he said gravely, "there is one way in which you might go to another land and begin existence anew—not alone. Your life should be ordered after the manner which seemed best to you. Only let me share it

with you. We would go back to Australia, to your own free forests, to Italy—anywhere that you might choose. You remember what I said to you—long ago at Galle—that I would never give up the hope of winning you. I have come now to ask you to be my wife. I offer you the most faithful love, the most devoted care. I dare not hope that you can love me in return. Oh, believe that I am content to trust in time, in the power of my devotion. I ask only esteem, affectionate friendship: these you can give me. At least marriage might be the starting-point for which you long. Sweet ties and fresh hopes would brighten your future. Old sorrows might be, if not forgotten, at least merged in new interests and affections."

Ginevra withdrew her hands from his clasp, and shook her head in a manner inexpressibly mournful.

"I thought that you would have understood"—she hesitated, and a deep blush mounted to her brow—"you to whom everything is clear. You must know that for me marriage is an impossibility."

"Why an impossibility?" asked Will, passionately. "Must your martyrdom endure to the grave? Are you, a girl in years, to be debarred for ever from the sweetest joys of womanhood? No, no, a thousand times. Ginevra, if you have no pity for me, at least have pity upon yourself."

"Oh, what can I say?" exclaimed Ginevra, in deep agitation, her voice gathering intensity as she proceeded. "I do feel for you. Oh, I do, I do Ever since I knew you it has been a sorrow to me that I should have caused you nothing but pain. I care for you too much to give you so much less than is your right. You deserve the best. By-and-by you will understand yourself better. You will see that you could not have been contented, and that I should be no fit wife for you. We may be brother and sister—but never, never what you wish. I should be wronging you—we should have wronged each other. Sorrow and sickness give clear vision. I know now what marriage means. . . I think of my father—of my mother. I think of how it was once with me. It can never be so again. To love one only, however sadly, is glorious, holy. To be false is the degradation of one's purest instincts. Marriage without the heart's love can bring nothing but a curse. . . . If I lived, I should grieve and disappoint you. Our union would be a mockery.

I should shrink from you; and you would fancy that perhaps I—that the past was still remembered. We should grow up apart, and the end would be regret and bitterness. . . . No, no. Think of me as one near to death, in whose short life dreams of love and marriage can have no place. And when all is over, keep me tenderly in your memory, but do not let me be a lasting sorrow."

"Ginevra! Ginevra!" pleaded poor Will.

"It is best so," she answered. "I am wiser than you—wiser than the doctors. I know that my time is not long. And I am glad—very glad. . . . Will, good-bye."

She moved a step forward, her sweet serious eyes bent upon him in all the tenderness and regret of parting. But he would not let her leave him thus. He called her name in accents of wild yearning love. Passionate entreaties poured from his lips. He pleaded as for a boon dearer than life. He besought her less for his own sake than for hers. . . . In vain. She shook her head; tears rolled down her cheeks, her voice was broken, but she was firm.

"Good-bye," she repeated. "God help you and make you happy. God reward you for your truth and loyalty. In a little while you will see as I see now; you will know that it must have been impossible. For the time that is left, be my brother; advise me, help me. To-morrow, perhaps, we will talk of the future, and you will tell me how I can best order my life. You were always good to me. You will be kind to the end. Farewell. . . . No, let me go in alone."

With one long look she left him. He watched her as she descended the zigzag path till her form had disappeared among the thickening olives.

He turned away, and, leaning upon the parapet, covered his face with his arms. When he raised his head, the sun had set. Here upon the hillside the shadows lay dark and mysterious; but valley and distant mountains were sleeping beneath a veil of violet and rose. . . . He was alone. So henceforth must he remain. His cherished image of Ginevra, his tender hopes of yesterday, had melted with the declining day. He heaved a deep sigh. But the feeling which crept over him was not that of despair, it was rather the chastened sadness which might visit the heart of a mourning mother, to whom has been vouchsafed a dim vision of her dead child in Paradise. It seemed to him at this moment that his ideal of

womanhood might be less purely revealed in that dream of Ginevra as wife and mother, than in the image of this girl martyr, this young saint, whose consecrated life must wear out its allotted span under the shadow of these Provençal hills.

THE END.

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